

# Tracing Rishism in Kashmir: A Study of Nūr al-Dīn's Rīshī Family Tree

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## ABSTRACT

In the Kashmir Valley, there has always been a group of religion-oriented people who profoundly impacted the Kashmiri society. Because of their religiosity, people commonly knew them by the name of *Rīshīs*. With the advent of *Ṣūfī* preachers from Persia and Central Asia in the fourteenth century, a new chapter opened in the Kashmiri religious history. As they came with a humanitarian attitude to spread Islām, by the turn of the sixteenth century, the Valley had a majority of Muslims. Prior to this, Hinduism predominated Kashmir, which was rooted in its traditionally accepted caste structure, ritual system, *Kula* system, etcetera. Besides *Ṣūfī* preachers, the indigenous *Rīshīs* also paved the stage for the transformation of Kashmiri society by opposing Hinduism and providing the masses an alternative. The connection and influence of *Ṣūfīs* on the local *Rīshīs*, particularly Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn, commonly known as Nund *Rīshī*, accounted for two forms within the *Rīshī* movement, which came to be known as Muslim Rishism and non-Islamic Rishism. Nūr al-Dīn furnished the Kashmiri people with a *Rīshī* lineage or *Rīshī* family tree whose originator and founder is none other than the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ himself. The present research will trace and examine this *Rīshī* family tree in relation to the *Rīshī* movement in Kashmir until the times of Nūr al-Dīn.

**Keywords:** Kashmir, *Rīshī*, *Rīshī* movement, Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn, *Rīshī* family tree.

## INTRODUCTION

Kashmir Valley is also known as *Rēshwār* (Land of the *Rīshīs*), *Pirwār* (Land of the *Pīrs*), or *Rīshī Vatika* (the garden-house of *Rīshīs*). The history of Kashmir Valley, as per legendary accounts, begins with the *Rīshīs*. According to tradition, Kashmir Valley sprang from a lake named *Satī-Saras*. This water was drained out by a *Rīshī*, Kaśyapa,<sup>1</sup> after whom Kashmir is said to be named. Throughout history, the fertile soil of Kashmir Valley has produced honest and virtuous people. On the one side, Kings and ministers gained great spiritual status, while on the other hand, ordinary people strove effectively to obtain this prestige. According to *Nīlmatā Purāṇa*,<sup>2</sup> the first inhabitants of Kashmir were *Nāgas*, who were known for their religiosity and devotion. Kaśyapa brought people from numerous places and settled them here. They never got tired of adoring and obeying God. In the second century, through Aśoka (c. 304-232 BC), around 5,000 Buddhist monks came here to preach Buddhism. As a

<sup>1</sup> Kaśyapa is a renowned Hindu Vedic sage. He is one of the *Saptarīṣīs*, the Rīgveda's seven-old sages. Kashmir Valley, as well as countless other Sanskrit writings and Indian classics, are named after him.

<sup>2</sup> The *Nīlmatā Purāṇa* also known as the *Kāśmīra Māhātmya*, is an ancient manuscript from Kashmir that offers information about its history, geography, religion, and folklore. It was written during the sixth and eighth centuries. Kalhaṇa has utilised it as one of his historical sources.

result, Kashmir became recognized as a hub of learning and wisdom. Many well-known poets, grammarians, logicians, philosophers, and literary figures flocked here to pursue knowledge. Hindus from Gandhāra subsequently immigrated with Hūṇa ruler Mihirakula (d. 533 CE) and introduced their faith across the Valley. Islām had spread to Kashmir's bordering nations by the early eighth century, and Arabs were continuously making efforts to gain access to the Valley. It is also worth mentioning that the rulers of this region put their forces under the command of Turkistānī Muslim generals who were well-versed in battle tactics and fighting. In addition to many Muslims, *Rīshīs* came from outside and formed a separate colony, built mosques and seminaries, and attracted people to Islām to the stage that the King's palace was illuminated by the light of Islām in the fourteenth century. They brought about a significant transformation in Kashmiri society, particularly among the *Rīshīs*. Following that, Shāh Mīr (1300-42 CE) founded the Sultanate (1320-1555 CE), during which Islām flourished across the Valley. *Rīshīs* who were earlier associated with any non-Muslim *Rīshī* now proudly ascribed themselves to Islām and its last Prophet, Muḥammad ﷺ. Nund *Rīshī* or Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn (c. 1377-1438 CE), on the other hand, was also delighted to be a follower of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and to be associated with him. Furthermore, in his poetry, he introduced a family tree of *Rīshīs*, the founder of whom he put none other than Prophet ﷺ. The present work is mainly divided into two sections. The first part traces the *Rīshīs* in Kashmir until the introduction of Islam. In the other half, the *Rīshīs* up to Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn are evaluated in the light of his *Rīshī* family tree.

## RĪSHĪS FROM THE ANCIENT TIMES

The term *Rīshī* (*Rṣi*) comes from the Sanskrit root word *rṣ*, which means “a hymn singer, inspired poet, or sage.” According to mainstream Hindu doctrine, the *Rīshīs* are “inspired personages to whom these hymns were revealed.” However, the *Rīshī* was commonly used among Hindus to refer to “a saint or sanctified sage, an austere anchorite” (Williams, 1986, pp. 226-27). Hassan Khoihami (1832-98 CE) also mentions the Sanskrit origin of the term *Rīshī*, stating that such a person deserves to be referred to as a *Rīshī* who has lost his identity and become one with the Real Being. The one who despises the world and is free of wrath, lust, greed, attachment, and ego; derives no pleasure from the soul or spiritual inclination (Khoihami, 2022, p. 149). Many other writers have used similar language to define the various aspects of the term *Rīshī* (Dedamari, 2019, p. 103; Khaki, f. 39a, 41b, 42a; Miskin, 2015, p. 201; Nuri, f. 145a).

According to legends, Kashmir's history is traced back to the *Rīshīs* of the *Nāga* tribes, the Valley's first inhabitants. As per *Nīlmatā Purānā*'s account, when the *Garuḍa*<sup>3</sup> had obtained the boon of eating the *Nāgas* from Indra,<sup>4</sup> *Vāsuki*<sup>5</sup> pleaded to *Janārdana*, the god of the gods, for protection, who told her to dwell in the country of *Satī*<sup>6</sup> along with the pious *Nāgas* (Kumari 1968, 19). In both Kashmiri and Sanskrit languages, the word ‘pious’ has a literal meaning of ‘*Rīshī*’, as if these *Rīshīs*, or pious *Nāgas*, were the Valley's first dwellers (Nazki, 1991, p. 110). After the desiccation of water, Kaśyapa and the other *Rīshīs* constructed hermitages around the Valley (Kumari, 1968, p. 51). Kaśyapa *Rīshī* brought men from neighboring lands and settled them in the Valley who would live with the *Nāgas* for six months of

<sup>3</sup> *Garuḍa* is a Hindu demigod and celestial creature who appears in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. He is most commonly depicted as the Hindu god Viṣṇu's mount (*vāhana*). He is the sage Kaśyapa's and Vinatā's son. *Garuḍa* appears in various other works, including the *Purāṇas* and the *Vedas*.

<sup>4</sup> Indra is a Hindu deity from the Vedic period. He is the God of *Svarga* and the *Devas*. He is linked to the sky, lightning, weather, thunder, storms, rain, river flows, and battle.

<sup>5</sup> *Nāga* chieftain who possessed unmatched power.

<sup>6</sup> *Satī* is the Hindu goddess of marital happiness and longevity, and is revered as a manifestation of the mother goddess Śakti. She is widely regarded as Śiva's first wife, the other being *Pārvatī*.

the year, and then the *Nāgas* would spend the remaining six months with the *Pisācas*, the eaters of raw flesh. When all these men went out after living under the above state of affairs, a good old Brāhmaṇa named Candradeva, who had obtained complete indifference to worldly objects, did not go out due to being ordained by the future events (Kumari, 1968, p. 86). The one who gives up all desires, renounces the world, and engages in the strictest worship and austerities achieves total detachment from worldly things. This penance and self-abnegation lead him to a point where he has already heard or seen news of future occurrences, and these traits define the *Rīshī*. As a result, it's not unreasonable to assume Candradeva was also a *Rīshī*.

The aborigines, that is, the *Nāgas* and *Pisācas*, were dominated by the immigrants from outside the Valley. They permanently settled in the Valley after the permission of Nīla<sup>7</sup> on the condition that they conformed to the social usages and customs of the *Nāgas*. When the Valley became permanently inhabited by different groups of people, it split into numerous *Kuttarajas* or small kingdoms. Kalhaṇa (c. 12<sup>th</sup> century) has given a brief outline of the period before the Mahābhāratawar. Starting from the reign of Gonanda-I, followed by his successors, he says that thirty-five kings who followed after Gonanda-II have been immersed in the ocean of oblivion, their names and deeds having perished through the destruction of the records (Kalhaṇa 1: 83). Later, Hassan filled this void by allotting a thousand years of rule to twenty-two kings of the Pāṇḍu dynasty (Sufi, 1948, p. 36). Although Kalhaṇa has given no detailed information about the conditions prevailing in Kashmir during the Pre-Aśoka period, it is stated that the Greeks also ruled Kashmir for some time, and Kashmir formed a part of Gandhāra, the eastern region of Afghanistan (Bamzai, 1994, pp. 66-67). They called Kashmir *Kaspeiria* (Tarn, 1938, p. 238), and Herodotus (c. 484-425 BC) regarded it as *Kaspatyros* and Hekataios (c. 550-476 BC) called it *Kaspalyros* or *Kaspapyros*. Even in Kashmir at that time, not only was there a tradition of Rishism, but the social position of the *Rīshīs* and their religious influence was so authentic and reliable that when a Greek viceroy, Spalahores (c. 1<sup>st</sup> century CE), minted his coin in Kashmir, instead of Spalahores, he wrote Spala*Rīshī* on it (Nazki 1991, 109). Later, through Aśoka, 5000 Buddhist monks came and settled in Kashmir to spread the message of Buddha in Kashmir and its adjacent territories. Since a monk is a member of a group of religious men who live a celibate life in a monastery, one can argue that these monks also were *Rīshīs* who worked tirelessly to challenge the caste-stratified Kashmiri society. They covered the Valley with monasteries, *chaityas*,<sup>8</sup> and other Buddhist foundations. During the time of the Kuṣāns (c. 30-375 CE), *Bodhisattva*<sup>9</sup> Nāgarjuna (c. 150-250 CE) obtained preponderance as a Buddhist thinker, scholar-saint, and philosopher from the present Hārwan near Kashmir's capital Srinagar. This Hārwan was then a lush forest known as the forest of six *Rīshīs*. In fact, the *Rīshīs* used to live from Hārwan to Khrew on one side and Safapora on the other side of the forest, and that is why the mountain behind Safapora is still known as *Rīshīwan* (Forest of *Rīshīs*) (Nazki, 1991, p. 113). Kalhaṇa reports that after defeating all learned opponents of Hindu tradition, Nāgarjuna abolished rituals described in *NīlmatāPurānā*. When the traditional customs of the Valley were broken, the *Nāgas* destroyed all people except those who offered oblations and sacrifices. Candradeva, a *Rīshī*, again comes to the scene and practices austerities to please Nīla, who saved them and revealed anew the rites prescribed in *NīlmatāPurānā* (Kumari, 1968, p. 86). Then we also see a *Rīshī*-King, Siddha, during the sixth century

<sup>7</sup> The King of the *Nāgas*.

<sup>8</sup> A *chaitya* refers to a shrine, sanctuary, temple or prayer hall in Indian religions. The term is most common in Buddhism, where it refers to a space with a *stūpa* and a rounded apse at the end opposite the entrance, and a high roof with a rounded profile.

<sup>9</sup> Any person who is on the path towards *bodhi* (awakening) or Buddhahood.

CE, who obtained the state of a demigod (*Siddhā*)<sup>10</sup> by living a pious life. This *Rīshī*-King found perfect adornment in the worship of Śiva, and although he lived in all the world's pleasures, he remained aloof from their influence.

The whole course of Buddhism changed when it suffered severe setbacks in and after the sixth century under the Hūṇadynasty and its successors. After killing the Buddhists in Kashmir, Miharakula brought Brāhmaṇs from Gandhāra and bestowed them a thousand *Agrahāras*<sup>11</sup> at Bijbehara. The Brāhmaṇs, who had now the patronage of Miharakula, propagated Śaivism and built a new religious account of Kashmir. Miharakula is also said to have constructed the shrine of Śiva at Srinagar (Kalhaṇa 5: 306). The rise of Brāhmaṇism from the Kārkoṭa period (c. 625-855 CE) also brought Vaishnavism to the fore, and the priestly community began advocating and favoring Viṣṇu worship. A devastating famine occurred under the reign of Tunjīna I in the seventh century, which Kalhaṇa described as akin to hell. The King's saintly wife impressed the protector of the earth with her penance and devotion to the point where birds like pigeons began to fall from the sky, quenching the people's hunger. This woman *Rīshī* was not only compassionate to the masses but also to all living creatures. She also founded the *Agrahāras* of Katimusa (Qaimoh) and Ramusa (Ramuh) for Brāhmaṇs (Kalhaṇa 2: 55). There has never been a moment in Kashmir in which one or the other *Rīshī* has been engaged in worshipping his God among the people or in isolation from them. If people ever fell victim to moral corruption or wickedness at any time, it was the *Rīshī* who would set them free from the clutches of darkness and lead them to the path of righteousness. Kalhaṇa and some historians (Bamzai, 1994, p. 111; Dedamari, 2019, pp. 34-35; Khoihami, 2013, pp. 77-78; Sufi, 1948, p. 40) have mentioned the story of a man, namely Saṁdhimat, who gained currency sometime after Tunjīna I. A minister of Jayendra (BC 61-24 CE), Saṁdhimat, was the greatest of sages who was free from all desires and passions. The evil men inflamed the King's enmity, and he was put to death, only to resurrect miraculously and rule Kashmir for a half-decade. He was renowned as *Āryarāja* because of his extraordinary life and devotion to Śiva. Adorned by ascetics, his court resembled Śiva's assembly. He also constructed several shrines, *Liṅgas*, Śiva images, and *Triśhūlas* all over the Valley (Kalhaṇa 5: 133). Later, he is said to have renounced everything and lived as a recluse (Sufi, 1948, p. 111). From the ninth century onwards, the sage Vasugupta (c. 875-925 CE), Somānanda (c. 900-50 CE), Utpaladeva (c. 925-75 CE), and the famous Śaiva theologian Abhinavagupta (950-1016 CE) developed a new monistic philosophy and its texts (c. 975-1025 CE). Śiva is regarded as the sole reality, the material and efficient cause of the universe in this school, and liberation (*mokṣa*) is only attained through profound meditation on Śiva as the supreme reality and acknowledgment of Śiva's unity with the individual soul. However, these theoretical treatises were beyond the grasp of most people (Ray, 1970, p. 174). Despite establishing this ideology, the embedded caste structure and tantric hedonism progressively swept throughout Kashmiri society, was met with misrule, internecine feuds, and civil wars that resulted in moral and political instability in the region.

## EARLY CONTACTS WITH MUSLIMS

Arabs had reached near to Kashmir's frontiers in the early eighth century. We see that Chadrāpīḍa (r. 712/13-20 CE) and Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa (d. 760 CE) petitioned the Chinese emperor for assistance against the Arabs invading from Sindh and Multan. Most of the attempts were foiled, which were made

<sup>10</sup> A person who has gained perfection or heavenly joy is known as *Siddhā*.

<sup>11</sup> An *Agrahāra* was a grant of land and royal income from it made by a monarch or a noble family in India for religious purposes, primarily to Brahmins to maintain temples or pilgrimage sites and support their families.

to conquer the Valley (Dedamari, 2019,p. 655).Nevertheless, when neighboring countries fell under Muslim control, their imprints were seen in Kashmir Valley as well. As a result, the Muslim presence in Kashmir was felt for the first time during the reign of Vajrāditya (763-70 CE).Later, Muslim adventurers, fortune seekers, traders, and settlers poured into the Valley and formed a new colony of Muslims known as *Mlecchmar*(the place of *Mlecchās*) inSrinagar. When Maḥmūdof Ghaznī (971-1030 CE)led a series of expeditions across the Indus Valley and the Punjab plains in the early eleventh century, he also made several attempts to conquer Kashmir,but to no avail. However, according to Khoihami's account, he stayed in Valley for about 31 days and converted many people to Islām. Later, he went to Mount Sulaymān (modern Śaṅkarāchārya hill) and offered noon prayers (Khoihami, 2013,pp. 127-28).Since Kashmiris were not well-versed in Turkish war tactics, they needed Muslims to instruct them in superior military technology and tactical warfare in order to protect their frontiers from foreign invaders. For this reason, Kashmir has Muslims in senior positions in the armies of Ananta (1028-63 CE), Harṣa (1089-1101 CE), Bikṣācara (1120-21 CE), and Jayasīnha (1128-49 CE).With the increased Muslim presence in Kashmir, *Ṣūfī* preachers from Central Asia and Persia discovered that the environment was conducive to spreading their faith. They came up with solutions to the problems of injustice, disharmony, and people's misery by appealing to the 'heart' rather than the 'head' (Sufi, 1948,p. 550).According to historians, SayyidSharfal-Dīn alias Bulbul Shāh (d. 1327 CE), alongwith his disciples and other preachers, were the first batch of $\dot{S}$ ūfīs to set foot in the Valley to propagateIslām.<sup>12</sup> However, we cannot overlook the fact that *Rīshīs* and *Ṣūfī* preachers arrived here long before him, but their names and services have been lost to history.Riñchana (r. 1320-23 CE), the reigning Buddhist ruler of Kashmir at the time, embraced Islām at the hands of this *Ṣūfī*preacher and took the name Sultan Ṣadr al-Dīn. As a result, he became Kashmir's first Muslim ruler. He later built a *Khānqāh* in his honor and gifted it with a rent-free land grant to pay tribute to his memory. Following his conversion, his brother-in-law and commander-in-chief, and several others embraced the new faith.Many non-Muslim *Rīshīs*, including LalDed (1320-1392 CE), also came in contact with these *Ṣūfīs* (Mishkati, 1979, pp. 397-98; Sufi, 1948,p. 99). So, it is not unreasonable to say that these *Ṣūfī* preachers influenced even the *Rīshīs*, leading to the formation of two identities, that is, Muslim *Rīshīs* and non-Muslim *Rīshīs*, in the *Rīshī* movement. Nevertheless, after converting to Islām, they maintained core aspects of ancient prevalent Kashmiri religious culture, such as cave meditation, abstinence from marriage, vegetarianism, et cetera.

### NŪR AL-DĪN'S RĪSHĪ FAMILY TREE

We only find a few names of *Rīshīs*in the history of Kashmir who lived before the establishment of the Sultanate in the fourteenth century. The earliest mention of the names of these *Rīshīs* appears in ShaykhNūr al-Dīn's famous poem, which is about the *Rīshī* family tree.The following are Nūr al-Dīn's verses on the *Rīshī* family tree:

دوئم اویسّ قرنی او	اول ریشی احمد ریشی
ژورم حضرت پلاس او	تریم ریشی زلکا ریشی
شپیم حضرت میران او	پونژم ریشی رُمے ریشی
به گس ریشی میے کیا ناؤ	ستمس کریم دشنا ہشی

<sup>12</sup> Ashraf Wani asserts unequivocally that Bulbul Shāh was the first *Ṣūfī* to set foot in the Valley. Muhibbul Hasan, on the other hand, says that he came along with 1000 fugitives from the Mongol invasion, while Farooq Bukhari also mention that he was accompanied by numerous preachers and learned men. It is apparent that he could not have arrived from Turkistan alone. For more, see Bukhari (2013, p. 63), Hasan (1959, p. 39) andWani(2004, p. 298).

The first *Rīshī* was Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ; The second in order was Uways of Qarn;  
The third *Rīshī* was Zulkārīshī; The fourth in order was Palāsman *Rīshī*;  
The fifth was Ruma *Rīshī*; The sixth in order was Mīrān *Rīshī*;  
The seventh (me) is miscalled a *Rīshī*; Do I deserve to be called a *Rīshī*? What is my name? (Afaqi, 2008, p. 29)

When a caller or preacher calls people to a particular religion, it is a well-known approach that s/he always refers people to familiar things. Since the Valley's populace had been affiliated with un-Islamic ideas for generations and had a profound impression of the magnificence of the seven *Rīshīs* (*SaptRīshīs*)<sup>13</sup> in their minds, Nūr al-Dīn provided them with an alternate model of the seven *Rīshīs*, namely Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, Uways Qarnī, Zulkārīshī, Palāsman *Rīshī*, Ramuh *Rīshī*, Mīrān *Rīshī*, and Nūr al-Dīn himself. Alluding people to these *Rīshīs* in his verses on the *Rīshīs*' family tree implies that people were already intimately acquainted with them. Nūr al-Dīn's alternate model was essential because they believed that the *SaptRīshīs* were the ones to whom God had granted His blessings after being pleased and that they also needed to follow in their footsteps. Nūr al-Dīn tracked the *Rīshīs*' lineage back to Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ rather than any pre-Islamic *Rīshī* and made it clear in his poetry that the message he spreads follows the path of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*<sup>14</sup>. Prophet ﷺ had impeccable habits and an undeniable personality since childhood, and he never participated in idolatry ritual practices or lied. Because of his upright conduct, he earned the nicknames “*al-Amīn*” (loyal, trustworthy) and “*al-Ṣādiq*” (truthful) (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī 1:3). Bahīrah, a Christian monk, is reported to have predicted his future as a Prophet of God at the age of eight or twelve (Tirmidhī 3620). As narrated by ‘Ā’ishāh that when the love of seclusion was bestowed upon him by God, he went into isolation in the cave of Ḥirā and constantly worshipped until the truth in the form of Revelation descended upon him (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī 1:3). God commanded him to avoid contact with all filth, whether belief and thought, moral code, dress, or lifestyle (Qur'ān 74:5). Consequently, he was elevated to a position of high and noble character (Qur'ān 68:4). His message reached all corners of the globe, including Kashmir. He is known as the wellspring of divine mercy, the peoples' direct benefactor, and from him flows the *Rīshīs*' stream of grace throughout time. Nūr al-Dīn, in his *Rīshī* family tree, has explored the connections with *Rīshīs* who received spiritual guidance directly from the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, rather than through a visible mentor (*murshid*) as Uways. Uways al-Qarnī of Yemen (594-656 CE), who lived during the Prophet ﷺ era, is placed second in Nūr al-Dīn's family tree of *Rīshīs*. He was one of the great *Rīshīs* of the world. In his favor, Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ used to remark that Uways is the best of the successors (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 6491). He always received indirect esoteric blessings from the Prophet ﷺ, and some believe that the unseen grace reaches the *Rīshīs* through him. Nūr al-Dīn's goal in connecting the line of *Rīshīs* with Uways was to motivate Muslims to follow the Prophet ﷺ path like Uways, for which Muslims have only two sources, that is, the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The names of seven *Rīshīs* mentioned in the *Shatapatha Brahmana* and *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* are Atri, Bharadvaja, Guatama Maharīshī, Jamadagni, Kashyapa, Vasistha and Vishwamitra. However, Mahabharata gives a little different list as Marichi, Atri, Pulaha, Pulastya, Kratu, Vasistha and Kashyapa.

<sup>14</sup> *Sunnah* technically means the word, deeds and tacit approvals of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

<sup>15</sup> It is reported:

بِئِهِ اَوَيْسُ قَرْنِيْ اَبِيْهِ رَيْنَمَايْ

وَمِيْدُوَارِ جِهَسِ تَيْهِ وَوَبْرَنْسِ

Our success in the Afterlife is guaranteed because we are following in the footsteps of Uways. (Afaqi, 2008, p. 99; Afaqi, 2014, pp. 365-66; Khoihami, 2022, pp. 155-56).

ShaykhNūr al-Dīn placed Zulkārīshī immediately after UwaysQarnī (Afaqi, 2014,p. 429).Zulkā was a great Rīshī in the past<sup>16</sup> who dedicated his entire life to worship and penance in the Dandakwan village of HamalPargaṇa.<sup>17</sup> He was making his daily sustenance from a small amount of fluids collected from a bush. Not much is known about him and MīrānRīshī, his Rīshī family tree successor.<sup>18</sup> As indicated by Nūr al-Dīn in other poems, MīrānRīshī was a resident of Rīshīwan, located in Safapora, who is also said to be an ancient Rīshīwho was always at odds with his soul. He dedicated his entire life to devotion and piety and used to worship God with earnestness and humility while taking very meager food. Purification of Zulkārīshī and MīrānRīshīfrom cravings and attainment of a high place in God's asceticism and piety made such an impact on Nūr al-Dīn's life that he prayed to God to endow him with like-exalted traits (Afaqi, 2008,pp. 430-31). And if Zulkā and Mīrān had such an impact on such a prominent personality, we can argue that ordinary people could never have lived without being deeply affected by him.

RamuhRīshī or RomuRīshī (Khoihami, 2022,pp. 157-58; Miskin, 2015,pp. 204-06)is also one of Kashmir's earliest pious Rīshīs. He isthe fifth Rīshī in Nūr al-Dīn'sRīshī family tree. He is reported to have been in India when RājāJassaka (1181-1199 CE) sought to conquerthe country in the late twelfth century. Later, he returned to Kashmir with Jassaka's army and retired to a cave in Ramuh hamlet, which thus bears his name. In this cave, he was served by two brothers, ShībānRīshī and RanguRīshī, andLidermanRīshī. Later, RamuRīshī brought LidermanRīshī and his brother PalāsmanRīshī into the fold of Islām and made them his disciples.RamuhRīshī did not eat meat or grains, preferring to eat wild herbs and vegetables. He was known for his excellence in devotion and piety. It is mentioned that when MaḥmūdGhaznawī entered Kashmir during one of his expedition attempts, after setting up a camp here,he learned of his accomplishments and traveled to meet him. The said Rīshī prayed for him, and with his blessings, he conquered Kalangar and Somnāth.About RamuRīshī's disciple PalāsmanRīshī, tradition says that he was the father of Khalāsman and YāsmanRīshī, who set out on the pathways and destinations of truth under the guidance of RamuhRīshī and his own brother LidermanRīshī. In worship and penance, he was far ahead of his brother. Following the way of Pās-iAnfās,<sup>19</sup> he held every breath in constant remembrance of God and eradicated every impediment that appeared in it.<sup>20</sup> He retreated to Bumzoo cave, where most people came to see him and continued to benefit from him to achieve excellent spiritual levels. He passed away at the age of 118 and was buried near his brother in BijbeharaKarēwa(Khoihami, 2022,pp. 157-59; Miskin, 2015,p. 207).

<sup>16</sup> The original verse is:

کڑھ پھلی کھیتھ کری سو      تھنڈک ونک زلکا ریشی  
تتھ میے ور دتھ دو      پوختہ بخت اوس موکتہ گوو

Zulkā, a Dandak forest inhabitant, used to consume the fruits of wild plants and pray, reflect, and worship in the love of God. He was saved and sent to God because he was a sincere admirer of God. O God, bestow such habits on me as well. (Afaqi, 2008, p. 431; Khoihami, 2022, pp. 156-57).

<sup>17</sup> HamalPargaṇa was included in the large Pargaṇa of Kamrāz. See AbulFazl (1927, p. 371) and Kalhana (2: 57).

<sup>18</sup> These verses are:

ژنبر ساسس آنزل چبو      ریشی ونہ بندی میران ریشی  
تتھ میے ور دتھ دو      اد دیہہ بیتھ آکاش گوو

MīrānRīshī, aRīshīwan resident, lived on bread and water for a thousand months. And all eighty-three years were spent in God's worship and remembrance. He then passed away after ascending to a higher status. O God, bestow such habits on me as well. (Afaqi, 2008,p. 431; Khoihami, 2022, pp. 152-154).

<sup>19</sup> Taṣawwuf defines it as the practise of remembering Allah at all times.

<sup>20</sup> It is reported:

نمی فرستس لون دڑاے      پزان ابھیاس پلاس ریشی  
کر بندن توشہ خداے      اکہ دمہ موٹھس نہ زاہ سے

PalāsmanRīshīcentered his entire soul on God's remembrance, overcoming any obstacles that emerged; He never missed to remember God for even a second. God is certain to be pleased with his faithful followers. (Afaqi, 2008, p. 431;Khoihami, 2022, p. 152).

The influx of Muslims into Kashmir continued until Shāh Mīr or Sultan Shams al-Dīn (d. 1342 CE) established the Muslim Sultanate in 1339 CE. Even at that time, there were *Rīshīs* everywhere throughout Kashmir who could feed people's spiritual thirst. The political uncertainty of Kashmir prior to the Sultanate period may have impacted in general and the *Rīshīs* in particular, which may explain why we know of *Rīshīs* who not only obtained spiritual training from various *Rīshīs* outside Kashmir but also moved to other lands because of the hostility they faced here. We learn about Shri Kant, a *Rīshī* who used to worship idols and execute rites on Mount Sulaymān. He became a follower of Islām and memorised the Qur'ān. Fearing for his community, he traveled to Samarqand and returned to Kashmir after gaining Islamic knowledge. He met the hatred and envy of his relatives once more and traveled to Khatlon to serve Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (c. 1312-1384 CE). When asked about his country, he called it *Bāgh-i Sulayman* (the garden of Prophet Solomon) and recounted his circumstances, which led to Sayyid naming him Shaykh Sulaymān and returning to Kashmir with Sayyid (Khoihami, 2013, p. 221; Mishkati, 1979, p. 176; Miskin, 2015, p. 318).

Khalāsman *Rīshī* is also said to have gone to Śivalik hill and received spiritual training from the disciples of Sarbhāng *Rīshī* there before returning to Kashmir (Khoihami, 2022, p. 159). It's likely that before returning to the Valley, he brought several *Rīshīs* with him who could have spiritually elevated and enlightened Kashmiris. Throughout his life, he was able to control his desires and cravings. He died during the reign of Sultan Shams al-Dīn and was buried near his father, Palāsman *Rīshī*. Sultan Shams al-Dīn brought to an end the political instability in Kashmir, who, according to Jonarāja (d. 1459 CE), became the people's savior (Dutt, 1986, p. 26). Yāsman *Rīshī*, Khalāsman *Rīshī*'s brother, was similarly gifted in righteousness, the sacrifice of pleasure, and passion. He lived his entire life in a cave alone. He despised the world so much that when King came to see him with humility, he paid no regard to him because he was a man from the material world, and paying reverence to him was pointless (Miskin, 2015, p. 318). He was instrumental in converting Shaykh Sālār al-Dīn, Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn's father, to Islām. Nūr al-Dīn's mother, Sadra Moji, was also influenced by him and embraced Islām, thereafter marrying Sālār al-Dīn under his guidance (Sufi, 1948, pp. 98-99). He died during the reign of Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn (d. 1354 CE) and was buried next to his brother (Khoihami, 2022, p. 160).

The year 1384 marked a landmark chapter in the history of Islām in Kashmir. The arrival of a great Kubrawī<sup>21</sup> *Šūfi*, a leader, an eloquent scholar, an illustrious and versatile writer, Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī, accompanied by about 700 followers (Sayyid 'Alī, f.5b), the majority of whom were great religious scholars and learned men, vigorously initiated the process of Islamisation of Kashmir during the reign of Sultan Shihābal-Dīn (d. 1373 CE). They established *Khānqāhs* throughout the Valley, which functioned as centers for spreading their religion throughout Kashmir. Many people, including *Rīshīs*, converted to Islām because of these *Šūfis*. While it brought about revolutions in administration, religion, society, thought, and culture, it also impacted the *Rīshī* movement. After the death of Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī, when his son Mīr Muḥammad Hamadānī (c. 1372-1448 CE) came here, with the blessings of his preachings, Rishism began to be absorbed in Islamic mysticism. Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn recognized his spiritual greatness and religious authority, swore allegiance to him, and became his disciple. His piety impressed Mīr Muḥammad so much that while referring to him as a *Rīshī*, he bestowed upon him *Khat-*

<sup>21</sup> The Kubrawī or Firdawsī order is a *Šūfi* order that traces back to Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ through 'Alī in terms of spiritual lineage (*Silsilah*). It is named after its 13<sup>th</sup> century founder Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 1221 CE), who lived in Konye-Urgench under the Khwarazmian dynasty (present day Turkmenistan).



*ilrshād*,<sup>22</sup> wherein he permitted him to invite and lead the people of Kashmir towards Islam (Afaqi, 2014, pp. 265-69; Khan, 2005, pp. 164, 256-57; Khoihami, 2022, p. 166; Miskin, 2015, p. 222). For the rest of his life, he carried out the duties of a reformer and attempted to remove all non-Islamic elements from Rishism. As a result of these reforms, conversion to Islām became a requirement for the *Rīshī* movement (Bukhari 2013, pp. 159-60; Mishkati, 1979, p. 87). Without examining LalDed and ShaykhNūr al-Dīn individually, the *Rīshī* movement will indeed be incomplete.

LalDed, also known as Laleshwari, was born during the reign of Udyānadev (r. 1323-1338 CE) in 1320 CE at Sempora Pampore (Munawwar&Shoq, 2014, p. 62). She was the daughter of Shri Chandra Pandit. Since childhood, she was captivated by divine love, became estranged from the rest of the world, and set out in search of truth. Shri Pandit, their family guru, also kept a close eye on her and raised her on the spiritual path with his guidance. Many legends have been attached around her, glorifying her spiritual brilliance. Lal's life was marked by constant transformation, broadly classified into three stages. The first stage of her life is devoted to overcoming her limited vision, which keeps her bound to the material world. The second stage symbolizes her experiences with continuous introspective reflection, and the final stage is when she turns her attention outwards, realizing even her essential essence is also the foundation of the world around her (Kak, 2008, pp. 186-187). For this reason, she used the metaphor in a poem, which people have misinterpreted to this day, that she wandered naked in the mountains and forests.<sup>23</sup> And it appears that the *Yogini* encountered by Sultan Shihābal-Dīn in a forest and who prayed for him to become a great conqueror was the same LalDed (Dut, 1986, pp. 35-35; Mishkati, 1979, p. 83; Munawwar&Shoq, 2014, p. 60). She was not utterly detached from her society but used her poetic abilities to present a solution whenever there was a problem. Whatever she said or did was motivated by a desire to correct the prevalent false beliefs and practices and show the way to righteousness (Toshkhani, 2002, p. 110). The most robust flux that flows through LalDed is her belief that anyone, regardless of gender, class, or religious affiliation, can achieve enlightenment through personal effort. She used the *Vatsun* (speech) style of mystic poetry in her verses, known as *LalVākhs*. These verses are the oldest known compositions in the Kashmiri language and play a vital role in the history of contemporary Kashmiri literature. ShaykhNūr al-Dīn's poem has the earliest mention of LalDed, and while paying her respects, he has extolled her spiritual achievements, desiring to match them rather than surpass them.<sup>24</sup> Later, Persian chronicles, including Mullā'Alī Raina's *Tadhkirah al-'Ārifīn*, Bābādā'ūdMishkāti's *Asrār al-Abrār*, MuḥammadA'zamDedamari's *Waqi'āt-iKashmir*, and others<sup>25</sup> wrote accounts of LalDed's life.

LalDed had a profound influence on ShaykhNūr al-Dīn's life since childhood. He was born in 1377 CE in Qaimoh village of Kulgam district (Sufi, 1948, p. 98). According to tradition, when Nūr al-Dīn was born and refused to drink his mother's milk, LalDed happened to be visiting the place, and miraculously,

<sup>22</sup>*Khat-ilrshād*, also known as *Khilāfat-nāmah* (record of spiritual Vice-regency), is a letter of authority from a *Sūfī* Master (*Murshid*) to his most capable follower (*Murīd*). He (the *Murīd*) gains the necessary authority to guide and initiate other followers into his Master's *Sūfī* order as a result of this authority letter (*Murshid*).

<sup>23</sup>These verses are:

نینیر دوینم اندر اژن تھے بیوٹم ننگے نژن	گورن وونتم گئے وژن سہ میے لله گوؤ واکہ تم وژن
--	--

My guru gave me but one percept; "From without draw your gaze within  
And fix it on the inmost self". Taking to heart this one percept, Naked I began to roam (Temple, 1924, p. 173).

<sup>24</sup>These verses are:

بیہم گلے امریتھ چینیو تھے میے ور دہہ دو	نس پدمان پورچہ للے سو سائی اوتار لولے
--	--

That Lalla of Padmanpore, who had drunk nectar;

She is the Avatar and Yogini, O God, bestow the same on me. (Afaqi, 2008, p. 430; Kamil, 1966, p. 53).

<sup>25</sup>LalDed's life is also described in *Majmu' al-Tawarikh*, *Tarikh-i Hassan*, *Tarikh-i Kabir*, and other later Persian chronicles.

Nūr al-Dīn went to her and drank milk from her breast (Miskin, 2015, p. 210). The infant Nūr al-Dīn was thus attached to her, and she similarly inspired him since then. He was married to ZaiDed and had two sons and a daughter. He was devoted to divine worship and religiosity from an early age and often delved into spiritual matters, the enigmas of existence, and the possibility of salvation in this world. At one stage of his life, he believed it was impossible to recognize Reality while living in this world, and salvation was a long way off.

Nūr al-Dīn's life, like that of LalDed, went through a transition. The first phase can be stated as when he lived with his family. Because there was an established practice in Kashmir of renunciation from the world, going to the wilderness, and performing austerities, Nūr al-Dīn followed suit, set out on his religious quest, and moved into a cave at Qaimoh. After twelve years in this cave, he controlled his sensory powers and sensual desires, yet he still couldn't find the truth. In the second stage, his life evolved when he met *Ṣūfī* preachers, particularly Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Hamadānī and Sayyid Hussain Simnānī (d. 1389 CE). Then he rejected severe asceticism and felt highly ashamed at wasting so many years of his life in forests and caves.<sup>26</sup> He realized that the true purpose of life is to discover the truth, for which human society is supreme to caves and forests.<sup>27</sup> He dedicated himself to the duty of reforming society by becoming a conscientious preacher from now on and then traveled all around the Valley to impart the message of Islām to the common masses. Thus Islām reached Kashmiris through the indigenous language of Kashmiri as used by Nūr al-Dīn in his poetry or *shruks*, which became known as the *Koshur Qur'ān* (Rendering of Qur'ān in the Kashmiri language) (Munawwar & Shoq 2014, p. 72; Wani 2004, p. 68). This poetry was passed from generation to generation and preserved by Kashmir's diverse population. Its first compendium was composed in Persian two centuries after his death by Bābā Naṣīb al-Dīn Ghāzī, who had also remarked that nothing else had the same impact on him as Nūr al-Dīn's words (Mishkati 1979, p. 109). He had such an overall effect that Afghan ruler 'Atā' Muḥammad Khān minted coins in his honor in 1808-10 CE (Sufi 1948, p. 101). As far as the history of the *Rīshī* movement, it is evident that he was its revivalist, but in terms of spreading Islamic practices and rules and instilling Islamic character in Kashmiri society, he was its founder. As a result of his sincere efforts, a group of pious people was formed who participated in preaching Islām and whose sole mission was to call people to goodness and keep them away from evil deeds.

## CONCLUSION

Kashmir has traditionally been the abode of pious people known as *Rīshīs*. Even before the arrival of Islām, Kashmiri society was not mainly immune from the ills that arose from time to time due to power conflicts, societal dictators, and religious and moral exploitation. The *Rīshīs* were extraordinary people who lived in forests and mountains, isolated from the common masses, practicing strict penance and austerity. Albeit, they were apathetic about what was happening in society. The entrance of *Ṣūfīs*

<sup>26</sup> It has been reported:

میںے زانیوؤ بہ چہ بڑ عبادت  
سلس کرئی اکئی کتھ

نصر بابہ جنگل کہسُن گیمِ خامی  
وچہتہ یہ اس بڑ بدنامی

O Naṣr, Making the forest my home at the start of my life was part of my immaturity. I was obsessed at the time with the notion that living a monastic life was the finest way to worship. But this is a total embarrassment. (Afaqi, 2008, p. 409; Afaqi, 2014, p. 181).

<sup>27</sup> It is reported:

گوپہن گگر برن واس  
نشہ اسن باڑن تيمے چہ خاص

ونن پُزری تہ واندر اسن  
پم پانژن وقتن اگہ مل کاسن

There are jackals and monkeys in the forests; The caves are infested with rats;  
Those who offer prayers five times a day to wash off the dirt of their heart;  
Those who lead a family life, they are privileged. (Afaqi 2008, p. 243).

and *Rīshīs* from many countries, mainly Central Asia and Persia, brought about a transition in all aspects of life in the Valley. While the populace accepted Islām in general, the *Rīshīs* precisely followed the same line and believed in taking refuge in the global religion of Islām. Given that Islām does not subscribe to monasticism and cave-dwelling, people in Kashmir progressively learned to know, comprehend, and accept its teachings. As a result, Kashmiris in general, and *Rīshīs* in particular, emerged from the obscurity of these caverns into the light of humanity. The *Rīshīs* effectively attracted people by teaching truthfulness, compassion, unity, modesty, and altruism in every domain. Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn gave the *Rīshī* movement a new depth by firmly associating it with his society while also making it relevant for the future. Furthermore, by imprinting Islām on Kashmir's *Rīshī* tradition, Nūr al-Dīn attributed it to the Prophet ﷺ, the wellspring of ethics and morality. He presented the Kashmiris with a *Rīshī* model and a *Rīshī* family tree, asserting that following their footsteps would enrich them with a treasure of knowledge, belief, and guidance to righteousness. He could have associated this movement with the Prophet's immediate successors, such as Abū Bakr or 'Alī, but by choosing Uways Qarnī, he confirmed that while a believer cannot physically see or meet the Prophet after his death, they, like Uways, can be enlightened by him and can quench their thirst with the fountain of his religiosity. Since Nūr al-Dīn designed the model for Kashmiris, it was necessary to integrate it into their culture and convince them to believe that in order to achieve the highest place in front of God, one does not have to belong to a certain caste, race, or region, but rather to be the most pious and virtuous. They also needed to be reminded that some of the religious personalities, namely Zulkā, Palāsman, Ramuh, and Mīrān *Rīshīs*, have already attained this status and have succeeded in this world and the next. According to Majrūh Sultānpūrī, "I was walking alone towards my destination when people joined me, and it became a caravan". (Saeid, 2003, p. 95) With Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn's efforts, a caravan of the righteous was founded, which accompanied the truth in the world and headed out towards the Ultimate Truth.

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