

# Khanqahi Pir Dastgir and the Evolution of Rituals

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## Abstract

Khanqahi Pir Dastgir at Khanyar in Srinagar is the centre of Qadriya Sufis in the valley of Kashmir. Among the Sufi Silsilas they the last to enter into the valley. But within a short period of time they became too much popular as compared to others. People of all faiths got attracted towards Qadriya Sufi center to seek guidance and also acquired knowledge of different allied subjects. Encouraging efforts changed the educational system and position of women in valley. The simplicity of the communication and uncomplicated devotional practices attracted the different groups towards Qadriya rituals. Day today life shows close affinity with their rituals as a result of their influence over a long period of time. The allegiance of all the craftsmen to the popular traditional practices which are only identified with Qadriya Sufis. Both urban and rural people got attracted towards their distinctive rituals. Through these rituals peace and prosperity engulfed the valley. The deep rooted faith of people in the practices is the clear indication of their years influence on overall society.

**Keywords:** Khanqah, Rituals, Peace, Equality, Unity, Education, Crafts

## 1. Introduction

Qadriya Sufis were the last of all major Sufi Silsilas to reach the valley during the second half of sixteenth century. But they proved the most influential through the centuries. Syed Nimatullah Shah Qadri (d. 1582.A D) was the first Sufi of Qadriya Silsila here. His presence proved very auspicious for the Sufis of Silsila to enter into the valley of Kashmir. They settled in the heart of Srinagar city. Srinagar was the biggest town and seat of power. In the hot seat of political power it was difficult to remain aloof from political influence, but they maintained a respectful distance from political activities. As compared to other Sufi Silsilas the number of Qadriya Shrines in the city of Srinagar is very high.

High thinking, simple and soft approach of Qadriya Sufis was instrumental in the process of social transformation. They primarily and meticulously worked for the welfare of people, by and large remained kind and sober while approaching the people in the valley of Kashmir. Their social appeal was based on humanism and large numbers were drawn and influenced, because majority of them were fed by the old traditional casteism. Within a short span of time they succeeded in inculcating the sentiments of fraternity and equity coupled with sense of service to humanity. Stressed on the need of development of man with the purification of mind through prayer and meditation. Not only in city of Srinagar but in the whole of valley their teachings helped a lot in eradicating social evils by advocating religious tolerance and concept of unity. Much emphasis is laid in this order on the practices of Shariah laws, norms of Tasawuf, good virtues and deeds of piety which are considered essential for salvation in this world and hereafter. The Sufi order spread in the whole of valley doing away with the hazards of Bidat (innovation) and making the ways and modes of ahli sunnat all the more popular. Respect and self confidence was provided to the residents of valley. Their guidelines were full of morals for rulers and other high officials. They always used to warn cruel rulers that they will be subjected to every severe punishment hereafter for having betrayed the trust of God reposed to them. The ruling classes were repeatedly reminded by them about the day of judgement when ordinary people would be questioned about their prayer, while the ruling class would be asked about their justice. It was the impact of their ideology that brought changes in law and order of the state. The whole administration began to work effectively and efficiently. Political spectrum of the valley got shaped and reshaped and people in general became honest in their day today dealings. They preached for universal brotherhood by making people understand that all are one and created by one God. They were of the opinion that those who are enamored with the world have their hands full of things being of little worth and value. The exterior of the world looks soft but its interior is a dry and coarse like hard nut.

With the efforts of Qadriya Sufis like, Mir Nazuk Niyazi (d.1614.A.D), Mir Ismail Shami (d.1618.A.D), Hafiz Mohd Ismail (d.1646.A.D), Mir Mohd Ali (d.1660. A.D), Hafiz Ali (d.1670.A.D), Sheikh Abdur Rahman (d.1703.A.D), Mir Abdul Fateh Qadri (d.1713.A.D), Syed Abul Baqa (d.1724.A.D), Ghulam Azad Shah (d.1788.A.D), Mir Mohiu'd-din, (d.1791.A.D), Syed Buzurg Shah Qadri (d.1816.A.D) and Mir Yasin Qadri (d.1887.A.D) etc. the present Khanqah in Srinagar became the centre of Qadriya Sufis in the valley of Kashmir commonly identified as Khanqahi Pir Dastgir. During the time of Afghan rule, 1753-1819.A D, the sacred hair of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (d.1166.A.D.) was purchased from a merchant by Afghan governor Sardar Abdullah Khan, 1806.A.D, and presented it to Qadriya Sufi namely Syed Buzurg Shah Qadri, (d.1816.A.D). Syed out of his regard and respect housed the sacred hair at Khanqahi Pir Dastgir for the common people. Syed also donated his whole property for the further construction of Khanqah. The place was regularly visited by the ruling section for blessings. At present the place is a source of attraction for both general public and officials.

Khanqahi Pir Dastgir is among the major Shrines in the valley. Khanqah played a significant role in promoting the cause of Sufism in valley. The sublime and eminent status of Khanqahi

Pir Dastgir embedded firmly in the psyche of Kashmiri Muslims is indicated by the name given to it. No other Khanqah enkindled such an ardour in the popular estimation as the Khanqahi Pir Dastgir during the later stage of Islam in Kashmir. Several factors contributed to its prominence, the most important being the sanctity attached to it for being after the name of world famous socio-religious reformer and founder of Qadriya Sufi Silsila Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (d.1166.A.D) of Baghdad. Popularly known in valley as Pir Dastgir (Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani) never visited the valley, but it were his followers who managed to introduce the Sufi Silsila here. Strangely enough for a devotee of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, it does not matter that he is entombed in Baghdad or elsewhere. But they have too much of respect for the Sufi. It is an indication of popularity that without paying any visit to valley the people are devoted to Sufi order and used to visit the Khanqah. The basic fact about the prominence of Khanqahi Pir Dastgir is bound up integrally not only with the spiritual personality and historical role of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, but importantly also with the place where his sacred relic hair is housed. It is a place of great holiness for the enthusiastic devotees of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani. There is something sacred about it in the consciousness of his devotees. The Khanqah was essentially mosque where regular prayer have been offered since the day of its inception. Khanqah being of multipurpose use, there was separate arrangement for the Chillah and wazifs. The historical role of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani and his followers is closely connected with the Khanqahi Pir Dastgir. It was here that Islam as a civilization, that is as unified body of beliefs, ideas and value elaborated and transmitted to Kashmiris that the evolution of different rituals related to Khanqah and life of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani. Considering the importance of Zikr from the Quranic point of view it is permissible and can be recited in congregation and alone also, but under the spiritual care of a perfect Sufi master.

The Khanqah of Pir Dastgir for centuries has remained the centre of learning. Educational system was boosted by them. More and more emphasis was laid by them upon the education of everyone especially the females. By virtue of Qadriya Sufis the position of women got completely changed in the valley. Learning has been defined by them as the highest attainment of humanity, a way leading to right conduct and cultivation of virtue. But learning without putting it into practical use would be meaningless. Teaching and imparting of knowledge is considered to be the noblest profession. There were already some learning centers in valley before the arrival of Qadriya Sufis. The mention may be made of Khanqahi Mu'alla of Mir Syed Ali Hamdani and some rituals associated with Khanqah.

Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (d.1384.A. D) founder of Kubraviya Sufi Silsila in valley of Kashmir introduced Awwad-i-Fathhiya as a wazifa for the followers of the order during his visit to Kashmir under the rule of Sultan Qutub'd-din,1373-89,A.D.and the construction of a Kubraviya Khanqah known as Khanqahi Mu'alla in Srinagar as a respect to Sufi. The same is an invocatory prayer based on some Quranic verses, Hadith and prayers of the Sufis compiled by Mir Syed Ali Hamdani. But there is strong belief among the Muslims of Kashmir that the group recital of the prayer was especially meant for them. Awwad-i-Fathhiya continued to be popular form of Zikr during the initial stage of Islam in valley almost in all mosques and Shrines. Its intonation in a reverberating manner may be regarded as the spiritual dimension

of Islam and cultural legacy of the Kashmiris. Awrad-i-Fathhiya begins with a prayer seeking forgiveness of Allah for one's sins. As everyone knows Allah is praised for his attributes, hence help of Allah is also invoked for the grant of peace to the people. During the time of Mir Syed Ali Hamdani and later Sufis of the Silsila the Awrad-i-Fathhiya must have been simply recited as a sort of Zikr. But after the mass conversion of people to Islam, the innate mode of social behaviour changed in such a way that the manner in which the Awrad-i-Fathhiya is vocally echoed in all major Shrines and mosques of valley, as a distinctive feature of Islam in Kashmir. Some other rituals followed by the people in valley of Kashmir were introduced by Qadriya Sufis.

To remember the contribution of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (d.1166.A.D) and valuable services he rendered to the Islamic world, his followers introduced the daily recitation of "Ya Sheikh Syed Abdul Qadir Shaiann-Allah" after every prayer. The recitation first started at Khanqahi Pir Dastgir at Khanyar in Srinagar then followed by the people in other Shrines and mosques as well irrespective of Sufi Silsila. The ritual of recitation of "Ya Sheikh Syed Abdul Qadir Shaiann-Allah", which a peculiar voice after prayers is integral to the spiritual and historical awareness of the Kashmiris as a whole. This is genuinely proved by the noticeable fact that the two hundred years old Khanqahi Pir Dastgir at Khanyar in Srinagar does not alone reverberate to the group chanting of a distinctive wazifa, but this devotional act is exhibited by the Kashmiris Muslims in other mosques of the valley also. Hence the collective recitation of a wazifa in the mosques and Shrines of the valley represents two historical realities. While one relates to the historical role played by Qadriya Sufis in the valley by giving a belief structure to Kashmiris in the form of remembering the founder of Qadriya Sufi Silsila religiously and the other is the gradual response of Kashmiris to it at the societal level through a process of spiritual and social evolution over past centuries. Yet another unique aspect of Khanqahi Pir Dastgir is the visit of large number of men and women irrespective of religion. There is hardly a day when people are not sweeping around the Khanqah. Though done out of great regards for the Sufis, the practice has always ensured a clean environment in the premises of the Khanqah. The devotees irrespective of their economic status bring food particularly Tahar and Qahwa to the Khanqah daily. Silsila Qadriya has made deep imprint on the religious and social life of Kashmir. With the result people at large followed the path of peace and harmony, pleaded for tolerance, love and affection among all sections of the society. Their standard of moral values became an example to all Kashmiris in diverse spheres of social life.

The impact of Khanqahi Pir Dastgir can be visualized through some other rituals observed by the people. The recitation of "Ya Pir Dastgir" after every prayer is a clear proof of their long lasting influence over the people. Even it is used by the people when they are in difficulties and in the morning before leaving the home for work. Even the "eleventh" of every month of Islamic calendar is still celebrated by all the Kashmiris to fulfill their wishes. On the very particular day people are invited and they used to sit together to recite the verses of Quran. The ritual boosted the brotherhood among the people in their respective localities. Really the impact of rituals is so deep that Qadriya Sufis in urban areas were very close to the artisan groups and lower strata of people. We also get the repeated references of the active role

played by them in encouraging people to take new crafts. The craftsmen of new craft were also Kashmiris and were drawn from traditional artisans of prevalent crafts of, wood, iron, gold, pottery, leather work and metal work etc. Almost all the craftsmen express their allegiance to the popular rituals and practices which are identified with Khanqahi Pir Dastgir (Qadriya Sufis) . The people belonging to various artisan centers and lower strata did not have much access to the socio-religious and cultural life in the towns. The simplicity of the message of love towards God and uncomplicated devotional practices and access to regular guide attracted the groups towards Qadriya rituals. They are consulted and provide guidance on all major decisions of the social and economic life of the people. Starting a new business, building a house, fixing a marriage or other issues of day today life the Qadriya Sufis play a role. Social life beyond family show a close connection with Qadriya rituals. The annual Urs of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani at Khanqahi Pir Dastgir in Srinagar is celebrated by the people belonging to different sections on eleventh of Rabiul Sani of Islamic calendar. The Urs is observed for which people look forward for such occasions. The annual gathering of Urs is attended by more than four lakh of people. In spite of having elaborate code the Qadriya rituals are practised by people with proper devotion and dedication . At times attempts were made to wean away people from the Qadriya mystic rituals. But the belief of people is so deep enough with the rituals that even the disturbance of last twenty eight years has not changed it. The present unrest in society is having the solution in Sufi thought. Because Sufism is a gateway towards peace and prosperity, like education and connectivity. Sufis have always boosted the concept of tolerance and fellow being with the people. So it would be far better if their message will be incorporated in school curriculum. For the purpose Sufi seminars free from political influence should be conducted at different places especially in those areas where the problem is more sensitive.

## **2. Conclusion**

The popularity of Qadriya rituals is a proof of their penetration to all areas of valley. The way people of all sections in towns got attracted towards their rituals was again repeated in rural areas. Their simple philosophy, use of popular language and egalitarian spirit influenced all sections of society. To begin with they would spend time in their company listening to their preachings. Gradually they adopted their rituals. This deep rooted faith in rituals indicates the influence of years and the original adoption of Islam through Qadriya Sufis.

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