

Understanding Rīshī Shruks of Kashmir in light of the New Criticism

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Historians call Kashmir as *Rash:var*¹ (valley of *Rishīs*) or *Rshī Vātikā*² (habitat of *Rishīs*). Word “*Rishī*” is of “Sanskritic Origin”³ and means an inspired poet or sage.⁴ Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn (1377/9-1420 CE) one of these *Rishīs* who happens to be a poet, spiritual leader and thinker of medieval Kashmir and commonly known as Shaykh al-‘Ālam (teacher of the world) is considered as the founder of an indigenous *silsilah* (order) in Kashmir which got currency in the valley and established deep influence on the masses and elite alike. This order is popularly known as *Rishī Silsilah* or *Rishī* movement. No doubt some scholars have doubted the originality of this *silsilah* and hold that this movement was there from the yore and some believe that this movement is an offshoot of Bakhti Movement which remained a powerful syndicate in India.⁵ As far as its philosophical dimension is concerned some deem it as a reinterpretation of Kashmiri Shaivism which is the cumulative mental contribution of ancient Hindu thinkers like Vasu Gupta, Somananda, Utpala Deva and Abhinav Gupta.⁶ Some see the elements of Buddhism⁷ at its base and some feel other undertones⁸ in its fundamental literature—*Shruk*.

Shruk is a term used for the Kashmiri poetic compositions of Shaykh Nur al-Din. These are primarily the quatrains and sometimes the number of couplets goes beyond twenty which form the basic literature of Kashmiri *Rishī* movement and provide props to the real understanding of this indigenous philosophy. The Shaykh was very much concerned about the artistic and aesthetic elements in his poetry. This is the reason that he chooses compact, complete, crispy, clear and proverbial style for his poetry. Some critics believe that he himself named his poetry *Shruk* which brings his creative and aesthetic sense to limelight. *Shruk* literally means knot. Mostly its first-third and second-fourth lines rhyme. It mainly contains the experiences of the poet and mentions them in a subtle way. Sometimes it seems to be a riddle and sometimes a maxim. Prof. Rahman Rahi is of the view that *Shruk* is a small Kashmiri *nazm*.⁹ Its common themes include self introspection, pondering over past, hereafter, denouncing vices and preaching virtues. In spite of being didactic in nature *Shruks* are loaded with paradoxical situations which bring beauty to these verses.

¹ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, N. Delhi, Manohar, 1997, p. 36.

² K. N. Dhar, *A Rosary of Hundred Beads*, Srinagar, J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, n.d., p. 6.

After the advent of Islam and during the Sultanate period in Kashmir (1320-1586 CE) a new term *Pīrī Vār* (Valley of Saints) was introduced instead of *Rash Vār*.

³ K. N. Dhar, p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ See “Bhagti Tahrik Aur Shaikh Nur al-Din Wali”, by Ratan Lal Shant, *Shiraza*, Vol. 17, No: 3.3, pp. 88-96.

⁶ K. N. Dhar, p. 3.

⁷ See *Shaykh al-‘Ālam: Ayk Muṭāla‘ah* by Muḥammad Asad Allāh Wānī, Srinagar, Mirza Publications, 1993, pp. 34-63.

This book is a lucid example of a subjective research in which the writer has tried to prove that Shaykh Nur al-Din had a great influence of Buddha. In enthusiasm he has based his theory on assumptions and has neglected the importance of objectivity in research. The writer has undermined the prerequisites for a healthy research and studies with respect to material used and methodology employed in social science and has attempted hard to prove something which has no historical and methodological base.

⁸ Manzoor Fazili, “Political Undertones in Shaikh Nuruddin’s Poetry,” *Alamdār*, Markaz-e Nūr Shaykh al-‘Ālam Chair, University of Kashmir, August 2008, p. 89.

⁹ Hamidi Kashmiri, *Shaykh al-‘Ālam: Hayat aur Sha‘iri*, p. 42.

“O you Pandit! By hymning Shiv Shiv and burning ghee in fire you cannot make Him listen to you. Provide this ghee to your body so that it gains strength. If you could not offer it to yourself then grant it to others who need it.”¹⁰

Someone has rightly said that the poetry is a result of increased knowledge and understanding. It is for this reason that Wordsworth (1770-1850) considers poetry superior to history, philosophy and science. To him poet is a man of greater sensibility, observation, reflection and imagination and of greater powers of communication. Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn is no exception to this fact. He was a man with increased knowledge and understanding which he himself claims in one of his *Shruks*.¹¹ The most effective means which made his movement pervasive throughout the Valley was common man's language and the genre he used to bring home to the people his message.¹² He was very much concerned about the artistic and aesthetic elements in his poetry.¹³ In spite of being didactic in nature *Shruks* are loaded with artistic and aesthetic elements which bring more and more beauty to his verses. Therefore to understand and interpret his poetry one has to be more cautious, technical and skilful.

To understand *Shruk* literature and the philosophy loaded in it we must know that the history of Kashmiri literature begins with poetry and the available poetry with us is only a thousand years old.¹⁴ We have two parallel genres maintaining their existence for the last one thousand years. (i) Folk songs and (ii) thought provoking metaphysical poetry which makes emphasis on thought and imagination. The former focuses on rhythm whereas the latter is highly loaded with Hindu mythology and is very close to *Shruk* literature in style and tone. It is for this reason that *Vākḥ* and *Shruk* literature bears remarkable imprints of *Shiv Sūtrās* and *Tāntrālōk* in diction and texture.¹⁵ To interpret these latter genres one has to understand the terminology and the diction of *Shiv Sūtrās*, *Upanishads* and *Tāntrālōk* with special reference to the changes occurred in the meaning of the diction and the meaning of the terminologies used in these writings of the Hindu past.

Kashmiri first appeared in writing during the 8th century AC in the *Sharda* script. After the advent of Islam in Kashmir during the 15th century, the Arabic/Persian script was adapted to write this developing language. Shaykh al-'Ālam's era is the era when Kashmiri as a written language was in its infancy and the books were written in Persian, *Sharda* or Sanskritized script. However in all cases Kashmiri had a poor script.¹⁶ *Shruks* were either written in *Sharda*¹⁷ or Persian script¹⁸ and were later on transcribed in modern Kashmiri script. This led to an unavoidable trauma to the *Shruk* literature and resulted in a great confusion regarding the accuracy of the text.¹⁹ No doubt for some historians there is no much difference whether the text of a particular *Shruk* is authentic or original. As Prof. M. Ishaq Khan believes that everything which comes in the name of the Shaykh is a historical development²⁰ or evidence²¹ or a social heritage.²² But for an interpreter and analyzer it is nothing but an interpolation. In *Rīshī Nāmās* or *Nūr Nāmās* one cannot fail to detect the interpolation in the verses of *Shruks*

¹⁰ Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-Ālam*, ed. II, Charar, 2008, p. 256. (The English rendering of this *Shruk* has been done by the author of this paper himself.)

¹¹ “*Ārī palan manz nāgī rādā rōvus...*”

Asad Allah Afaqi, “San: Tawārīkh dān, as: tī Ḥāzrat Shaykh al-'Ālam”, *Alamdār*, Markazi Nūr Shaykh al-'Ālam Chair, University of Kashmir, August 2000, p. 57.

¹² Muhammad Ashraf Wani, *Islam in Kashmir*, Srinagar, Oriental Publishing House, 2004, p. 67.

¹³ Moyeed-ul-Zafar, “A Fresh Approach to Shaikh al-'Ālmiyyāt”, *Alamdār*, Markazi Nūr Shaykh al-'Ālam Chair, University of Kashmir, Vol III, 2009, p. 124.

¹⁴ Naji Munawwar and Shafi Shouq, *Nov Kashri Adbuk Tava rīkh*, Srinagar, University of Kashmir, 1992, p. 42.

¹⁵ *Kām, krōd, mōh, ahankār chuy...* or *Lūb mārun, sa haz vaytsārūn ...* (Rasul Pompur, “Ḥāzrat Shaykh Nur al-Din Wali, tī Kashir Shā'rī”, *Alamdār*, August 2000, p. 166.)

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 35-41.

¹⁷ Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, N. Delhi, Manohar, 1997, pp. 187-188.

¹⁸ Some of the *Shruks* were even rendered into Persian without preserving its original text by the people like Baba Nasib al-Din Ghazi. The central idea of a *Shruk* was paraphrased with long interpretations and no attention was paid towards the poetic text. (Baba Nasib al-Din Ghazi, *Nur Namah, Passim*).

¹⁹ Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-Ālam*, ed. II, Charar, 2008, pp. 66-70.

²⁰ *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, p. 107.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 106.

²² *Ibid*, p. 44.

attributed to Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn.²³ Interpolations in any text are either interpretation of the original text or a mistake by a scribe or by a memorizer. Both of the cases are unacceptable to an interpreter as the former may be the error in interpretation and the latter is a clear mistake.²⁴

Poetry expresses what prose cannot and it is actually a highly loaded text which comprises different linguistic features. These linguistic features are actually words and are pregnant with meanings and expressions. To understand meaning of any particular couplet means to study and analyze words and the syntax of a particular sentence or a line of that couplet. Meaning seems a simple word apparently and is used to denote what is intended to be, or actually is, expressed or indicated. Literally it stands for what is referred to or indicated by sounds, words or signals.²⁵ In linguistics, meaning is what is expressed by the writer or speaker, and what is conveyed to the reader or listener, provided that they talk about the same thing which is known as law of identity. In other words if the object and the name of the object and the concepts in their minds are the same meaning is conveyed. But out of these three only two can be verified or falsified, namely the object itself, its referent, the concepts are not. Meaning is inferred not only from the verbal form, but also from the current context. It is assumed that some intended meaning is present by the writer or speaker in pragmatics in the message, which is then interpreted in terms of the knowledge of the listener or reader. The knowledge of the audience will determine how much or what he understands from the message. Ambiguity is an antonym of meaning. Ambiguity means confusion about what is conveyed, since the current context may lead to different interpretations of meaning or sense. I.A. Richards (1893-1979) is of the view that the total meaning of a word depends on four factors: (1) sense (2) feeling (3) tone (4) intention.

Sense deals with the literal meanings which a word used in any text convey. Therefore a poet, like the Shaykh, is very cautious about his selection of words in any *Shruk*. If a word is changed by a synonym or a text is paraphrased that affects the total meaning of that very text. There is no synonym in any language which conveys the meaning of equal gravities. Every word differs in meaning even from its closest synonym. Kashmiri language is no exception to this basic fact. With the spread of Islamic teachings, difficult and archaic Sanskrit and Persian words in *Shruks* were changed with simple ones²⁶ which not only distorted the meanings and feelings of a particular *Shruk* but also made the *Shruk* literature suspicious and unreliable.²⁷ In his early days the Shaykh's speech was Sanskritized but during his last phase there was a large chunk of Persian, Arabic and other non-Sanskrit words in his diction due to his close relation with the Sayyids.²⁸ But with the replacement of archaic words in the text this distinction was almost faded and eventually affected the understanding of evolution in *Shaykhī Shruk*.

Hundreds of the students and followers of the Shaykh transmitted his *Shruks* orally from mouth to mouth for a long time.²⁹ Kaṭ: Paṇḍit³⁰ who is supposed to be the disciple and a scribe of the Shaykh

²³ *Ibid*, p. 180.

²⁴ The arguments given in defense of *Shruk* literature by a veteran scholar Asad Allah Afaqi do not hold much water. His arguments are based on assumptions and lack a substantial evidence. It is interesting to see that he himself negates his arguments when he discusses the problems with the text of *Shruk* literature. (see *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-‘Ālam*, pp. 61-65, 65-71 & 73-77.)

²⁵ "Meaning," AS Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford, 1996, p.726.

²⁶ Hamidi Kashmiri, "Shaykh al-Ālmas Mut‘aliq Taḥqīqīk: Imkānāt," *Alamdār*, Markaz-e Nūr Shaykh al-‘Ālam Chair, University of Kashmir, August 2000, p. 18. and *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, p 107.

²⁷ There are many *Shruks* quoted by Asad Allah Afaqi in his *magnum opus Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-‘Ālam* in which the compiler has taken many *Shruks* with varied versions. Afaqi has failed to identify the original text which has eventually put many question marks on the authenticity of this collection. (See Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-‘Ālam*, 2008, pp. 86 & 135; 70-71 & 140; 413 etc.) If this work of Asad Allah Afaqi is compared with the *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-‘Ālam* compiled by Mōtī Lāl Sāqī the variants in *Shruks* portray the whole *Shruk* literature as a sheer confusion, notwithstanding the fact that both *Kulliyāts* are based on almost same sources. (See Mōtī Lāl Sāqī, *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-‘Ālam*, Srinagar, J&K Cultural Academy, 1985, p. 27 and Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-‘Ālam*, p. 486)

²⁸ *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, p. 105.

²⁹ *Islam in Kashmir*, p. 5.

³⁰ It is said that Kaṭ: Paṇḍit was a well-versed Kashmiri Pandit who had a good command on *Shastras*. He was in close company of many Hindu Saints. He was so impressed by the Shaykh that he accepted Islam and became his disciple and was named Quṭub al-Dīn who is buried near the grave of the Shaykh. It is said that he recorded the *Shruks* of the Shaykh in *Sharda* script but nothing is existent and it all remains mere claim up to this day.

leaves no record available to us to exploit. If Kaṭ: Paṇḍit had recorded any of the *Shruks* that serves no purpose in practical sense as nothing is extant today. Mullā Aḥmad Kashmīrī (c. 1420-70) is also known for his Persian translation of some *Shruks* in his book, *Mirā'ah al-Awliyā'* (c. 1420-70) which is unavailable. Mir 'Abd Allāh Bayhaqī is another person who is known as a recorder of *Shruks*. But the writer has not referred his sources and the situation becomes very pathetic when we compare his *Shruks* with those present in various *Rīshī Nāmās* of Chrar. Bayhaqī's compilation is anomalous as it contradicts and differs from the text of other *Rīshī Nāmās*. Same is the case of Bābā Kamāl and Bābā Khalīl's (c. 19th Century) respective collections *Rīshī Nāmā & Anbar Shumāmī* and *Rawḍah al-Riyād*. Both of the compilers lack scholarly authenticities as both of them provide us no sound references for their material. There is a gap of almost five hundred years and this gap needs to be bridged for proving the text collected by the duo reliable. *Nūr Nāmī* by Bābā Naṣīb al-Dīn Ghāzī in the early seventeenth century contains long interpretations of few *Shruks* with no reference and accuracy in the text. The *Shruks* in this collection are paraphrased and translated into Persian therefore of no significant use to interpreters.

There are the structural properties of an artifact which at first sight attract the attention of a critic or an interpreter. He carefully studies words, images, paradoxes, ironies, metaphors, myths, elements of religion and culture etc as an organic whole. If a single element among these linguistic features suffers any sort of change the complete organic whole is disturbed and so is the meaning of a text. There is no difference of opinion among the critics that the *Shruk* literature is highly loaded with thought and conveys a message to the masses. Every linguistic feature used by the Shaykh is intelligible and for a particular purpose. It is for this reason that it has survived for almost a century before being recorded properly. At the same time it is an established fact that the languages develop and change, so many of its linguistic features have been tempered intentionally or by sheer ignorance of the masses, scribes and historians.³¹

With changing times, context and feelings evoked, every word suffers a change in its meaning. Therefore it is irrefutable fact that a text needs an interpreting community. It is this interpreting community which consciously or unconsciously preserves the meaning of a particular word or a style, used by a particular artist or a community in a particular artifact, with a certain gravity of feeling, emotion and expression at a particular point of time. By interpreting community we mean that group of people which enjoys the contemporariness and ethnicity of a particular artist and are the natives of that place where the artist composes his artifacts. This community must understand and speak the same language in which that artist composes his artifacts. It is therefore this community which can be nearer to the meanings conceived by any artist and propagated through his creations. *Shruk* literature is completely devoid of this interpreting community. Almost every verse of the *Shruk* literature has a social, cultural, political and more importantly, topographical context³² which needs an interpreting community to interpret. *Lalī Vākh* cannot serve this purpose as it itself suffers the same trauma what has befallen on *Shaykhī Shruk*.

It is an established fact that the Shaykh has communicated his poetry to his disciples and students with a missionary purpose. He used his oral creations as a vehicle to convey a message to the masses in general and Pandit scholars in particular. So the Shaykh must have laid much more emphasis on the sound of the words and according to I.A. Richards "the sound of the word has much to do with the feeling it evokes." When a word is lost or replaced by other one, the quantity and quality of sound changes so the feeling evoked suffers a change. Tempering with the feeling affects the meanings of the text. It is for this reason that the different couplets of a same poem have different levels to evoke feelings in a reader which later on influences the whole meaning of that artifact. Therefore a particular poem of the Shaykh evokes a particular emotion or a feeling which has suffered with the change in the sound of the words due to the change in the words of the text.

³¹ Hamidi Kashmiri, "Shaykh al-Ālmas Mut'aliq Tahqīqīk: Imkānāt", *Alamdar*, August 2000, p. 16.

³² *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, p. 106.

Expression is the act of expressing. Literally expression is the action or process of making known one's feelings, opinions, ideas, etc.³³ Poets are skilled to express their emotions in a controlled fashion. A poet uses a metaphor to express himself forcefully. Metaphors used by the Shaykh are indigenous, local and mostly from the peasant and artisan class of the society. The fact is that the Kashmiri peasant's life has been closely interwoven with the Shaykh's teachings and mark an impact on the development of a new cultural trend.³⁴ His diction is simple and there is no artificiality. The sociological imagination makes *Shruk* literature a credible metaphorical account. Like other poets metaphors used by him increase the influence of a verse manifold. It blends two different worlds of meaning together and shifts the meaning of a construction from its normal use to a new one. Therefore any change or shift in the meaning of a metaphor directly tells upon the meaning of the whole poem. There are many metaphors and similes used by the Shaykh where modern scholars are not able to ascertain an agreeable and exact meanings. Similarly many expressions like *naman bal ghulā kartō...*³⁵ and *pashis āsi tsaki vāni tsakh...*³⁶ are almost impossible to understand. The different meanings provided by different scholars to these verses are based on mere conjectures without any reliable interpretation. Similarly his verses are couched by the imagery of birds and animals, of flowers and foliage, of mountains and landscape, of fish and fowl, of seasons and weather, of rivers and springs which need to be identified so that the meaning of those verses where they are mentioned is correctly established.

Personalities referred to in a particular verse links two different persons, person referred by a referent and the poet, together. In didactic poems this bears a great influence on a reader. It is either the person whom an author wants his reader to follow or shun away. If this person is shrouded in mystery and is unknown to an interpreter the referent loses its significance and the poem suffers badly. There are dozens of referents used by the Shaykh which have lost their meaning with the passage of time some of them are: Zalak Rīshī, Mīrān Rīshī, Pilās,³⁷ Sidī wōn:, Āv Sang³⁸ etc.

In T. S. Eliot's (1888-1965) phrase the Shaykh has used *Objective co-relative*³⁹ in his poems. For some critics it is a "vehicle of expression for the poet's emotion" and for a few "it is the poetic content to be conveyed by verbal expressions." The incomplete *Shruks* available with us have missing links and the poems of the Shaykh mixed with the poems of Lal Dayd or with the poems of his disciples⁴⁰ or other poets of archaic Kashmiri language have not only disturbed the Objective co-relative in the poems of the Shaykh and jeopardized the level and quality of emotion to be evoked by a particular *Shruk* but have also shattered the possibility of understanding its correct meanings. Shāmi Bībī⁴¹ and Bābā Naṣr al-Dīn (d. 1451) who happens to be the disciples of the Shaykh had a good command in poetry as is also evident from the former's elegy⁴² written by her after the death of the Shaykh. Possibilities are, therefore, alive that the compositions of the Shaykh on the face value are not all together his poetic contributions. It might be the collective contribution of the Shaykh and his followers which is further added on by different poets of past and present which puts many questions on this dynamic piece of Kashmiri literature.

³³ "Expression," AS Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, p.407.

³⁴ *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, p. 105.

³⁵ Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyat*, p. 185.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 366.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 429.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 315.

³⁹ The American Painter Washington Allston first used the term *Objective Correlative* somewhere in year 1840, but TS Eliot made it famous and revived it in an essay on *Hamlet* in the year 1919. For him it is "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula" for the poet's emotion so that, "when the external facts are given the emotion is at once evoked."

⁴⁰ As we are provided with many long and short poems attributed to the disciples of the Shaykh, his family members and peasant girls almost all of them seem to be poets and poetesses of great talent and using *Shruk* genre as their medium for communication. No doubt their poetic capability is yet to be established however one thing is clear that there were many people in previous times that were well versed in composing *Shruks* and there is a great possibility that the most authentic *Shruks* of the Shaykh in reality might be their handiwork. (see Moyeed-ul-Zafar, "A Fresh Approach to Shaikh al-'Ālmiyyat", *Alamdar*, Vol III, 2009, p. 118 also see Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyat*, pp. 22-29 & 463-478.)

⁴¹ Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyat*, pp. 477-78.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 26.

What an artist writes or conveys by his artifacts does actually a manifestation of his understand and critical evaluation of different issues he meets with. Words chosen and structure used by him are actually reflecting his psychological and philosophical structure, his mind set and his attitude and response to different values and problems. What is going on in his mind is mirrored in his artifacts. Didactic poets can never produce self-sustaining artifacts which are detached from the author at their birth. These artifacts are always read with reference to their author's overall life, circumstances and problems. One cannot claim "the death of author" in their case. Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn's biography and his circumstances can serve us as primary evidences in the interpretation of the *Shruk* literature. It will provide us a vista to evaluate the psychology and philosophical understanding of the Shaykh. His mental evolution and vacillation is manifested in his poetry but it is almost difficult to come up with a solution as there is no reliable biography of the Shaykh.

There is no doubt that the Shaykh like other artists and *da'is* (preachers) would have gone through different phases of evolution. His years of seclusion were different from his last days. Verses composed by him in the cave are supposed to bear "an indelible mark of Shaivite philosophy" by many writers.⁴³ He like other human beings imbibed the influence of others. It is for this reason that Bābā Kamāl makes a distinction between the *Shruks* composed during the early career under the influence of local environment and those which bear the influence of the Shaykh's association with Central Asian and Persian Sayyids.⁴⁴ However the task is not so simple. For example *andwan nīrith tap karhā*⁴⁵ *Shruk* is contrary to *Naṣir Bābī jangal khasun gayam khāmī*.⁴⁶ No one can say which one of the two is of later period as the former is finer in art than the latter which points towards the opinion that it had been composed by the Shaykh in his early career. However some hagiographical accounts say that the Shaykh had denounced renunciation after practicing it in his initial life. If taken authentic then we have to believe that the Shaykh has yearned to be back in the jungle in his later days.

It is because when a *Shruk* is detached from the reliable biographical account of the Shaykh, due to the insufficient, groundless and contradicting hagiographical accounts about his life, the concept of "death of the author" is automatically put into practice. This allows a loose interpretation of the *Shruk* literature and the whole literature loses its peg. It is interesting to see that wherever there is an interpolation or tempering in the text of a *Shruk* a story is concocted to make that interpolation reliable and meaningful. This has piled up enormous groundless stories about the life and circumstances supposedly faced by the Shaykh so making the Shaykh more obscure and in turn influencing the meaning of the *Shruks*.⁴⁷

In addition to other aspects, every poet is always influenced by the writers, poets, orators etc. of past or of his own times. Any well known master piece of art which is acclaimed by the critics as original and individual artifact of a particular artist when examined critically bears the significant imprints of the other artists of the past or contemporary artists of the author. These imprints are known as traditions and it is this tradition which is unconsciously imbibed by every artist. Prior to the Shaykh there is no significant tradition available with us. We are limited to count few names like Sidī Mōl,⁴⁸ Lal Daḡd⁴⁹ and Shaṭī Kanṭh.⁵⁰ It is for this reason we feel the *Shruk* literature is born from a void and

⁴³ Kashmir; *s Transition to Islam*, p. 102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Rasul Pompur, "Haḡrat Shaykh Nur al-Din Wali, ṭi Kaṣhir Sha'ri", *Alamdār*, August 2000, p. 167.

⁴⁶ Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyat*, p. 409.

⁴⁷ Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyat*, pp. 74-76. For a detailed discussion on the controversies about the life of the Shaykh see Asad Allah Afaqi "Ṣan: Tavarikh dān, aṣ: ṭi Haḡrat Shaykh al-'Ālam", *Alamdār*, August 2000, Kashmir University.

⁴⁸ Sidī Mōl was a teacher of Lal Daḡd. There are only few *vākhs* of Sidī Mōl which are in response to the *vākhs* of Lal Daḡd. Bābā Dawūd Mishkati in *Asrār al-Abrār* says that the real name of Sidī Mōl was Shri Kanṭh who happens to be a grandson of Shaṭī Kanṭh.

⁴⁹ In real sense Lal Daḡd (c. 1320-1392) marks the beginning of Kashmiri literature but unfortunately her life is shrouded in deep mystery. She is highly respected by Kashmiris and therefore elevated to the position of a semi-myth. Her poetry is charged with philosophy and is highly metaphorical.

⁵⁰ Shaṭī Kanṭh (= Shirī Kanṭh flourished in c. 13th century) is known for his book *Mahānay Prakāsh (Gōri Pustikā)* edited by Pandit Makand Ram Shastri and first time printed in 1918 CE. This book is written in verses and is based on the language of common masses as claimed by its author. This style is known as *Vākḥ* and owes its origin in Sanskrit poetry where it is known as *Vākhiyā*.

has no continuity in the past. This missing background again limits the scope of interpretation of the *Shruks* and plug in as an impediment to understand the psychological and philosophical development of the Shaykh. To believe that the *Shruk* literature is an original, individual and novel work of the Shaykh lands us in a grave situation. It makes us to believe that the Kashmiri has no literary tradition prior to the Shaykh and the *zenith* attained in the *Shruk* is all of a sudden without any element of literary development. It inhibits the critical instincts of a healthy mind and buries away the multiple innovative aspects of possible meanings of the words, phrases, terms and style employed by the Shaykh if taken into consideration with reference to the “tradition in oblivion.”

In light of above it seems a premature attempt by different scholars like Prof. Ishaq Khan⁵¹ who have tried hard to come up with the edifice of philosophical interpretation and religious thought of *Rishī* movement in general and of Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn in particular. In philosophy the stuff provided by any thinker needs to be interpreted and if this stuff is yet to be proven reliable the whole philosophy erected is nothing but a hotchpotch of different ideas of different people. However from the discussion above the author does not mean that the *Shruk* literature cannot be interpreted or understood correctly. It is an attempt to express clearly the burning problems in this field of research which a researcher faces during his studies. However it is very simple to understand that a multifaceted critical analysis of the *Shruks* is inevitable. This anticipated research does not mean to put all *Shruks* available in a single book and refer them to different manuscripts only. But like a true paleographer first of all one has to prove the authenticity of the manuscript he is depending upon. He has to devise a method to prove the reliability of every word or phrase or any other linguistic feature used in the text. Before taking this uphill task he has to revisit many indirect sources of history so that the Shaykh is relocated and revisited in his own multilevel and multifaceted context. After accomplishing this robust task one can understand the real philosophy of *Shruk* and can recoup the main thought of the *Rishī* movement in its true colour.

“Those are beautiful and virtuous souls who sought the meaning of the spiritual sayings. They found their place on the high thrones but no one knows their real value.”⁵²



It is a *Shruk* or *Pad* loaded with philosophy and needs explanation. It is said that it is unbelievable that the language used by Shaḥī Kanīh would have been the language of the common masses as claimed by the author. (*Nov Kāshrī Adbuk Tavarīkh*, p. 45)

⁵¹ Prof. M. Ishaq Khan in his book *Kashmir's Transition to Islam* has tried to defend every word which comes in the name of Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn and his movement. He has interpreted the religious thought and miracles of the Shaykh at length and has tried to put an end to all the criticism which is pointed towards *Shruk* literature and its concerned movement just by quoting everything without checking its authenticity. To prove his point he confuses polytheism with monotheism and religious syncretism with acculturation. (see *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, N. Delhi, Manohar, 1997, *passim*)

⁵² Asad Allah Afaqi, *Kulliyāt-i Shaykh al-Ālam*, p. 401. (The English rendering of this *Shruk* has been done by the author of this paper himself.)