

# Religious Tourism within the Context of Islamic Sufism: A Study of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani

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## Abstract

Religious tourism in Islam is not a new concept. It has its basis in the textual scriptures of Islam. Further, the issues and concerns of tourism have been extensively described by the legal scholars of Islam. In the discourse of spirituality, tourism holds a significant place. The inward and outward tourism is apparently demonstrated in the lives of Sufi saints of all times. Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani of Kubraviyah order is not an exception. Indeed, he made extensive travels to different parts of the world and spent almost 21 years in travelling physically. He also travelled inwardly and crossed many stages of spirituality throughout his life under the guidance of his teachers/mentors. The present study is an attempt aims to demonstrate tourism in Islam with special reference to Islamic spirituality. It will consider the nature of travel in Sufi literature and its practicality, especially taking into account the inward and outward travels of Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani.

**Key Words:** Kashmir History, Central Asia, Islam, Travel, Spirituality

## Introduction

The idea of travel exists in the world since inception. It is as old as is human history. Adam—the first man created (the father of mankind)<sup>1</sup> by God and inhabited in heaven<sup>2</sup>, however, was commanded to depart from heaven and reside on the earth.<sup>3</sup> From the physical perspective, Adam wandered (traveled) physically to meet with beloved wife, Eve—the mother of mankind and esoterically to quench the spiritual thirst of meeting with the creator (Gnosticism). They (Adam and Eve) met with each other at a place called (now) *Jeddah*<sup>4</sup> from an Arabic word *Jaddah*—means ancestors. From here, it may be quite rational to deduce the idea of travel and the notion of tourism in the world.

Travelling to places of diverse nature is mostly of two purposes followed by motivations. One is of the worldly affair and the other is purely religious or spiritual—called it in Sufi terminology. An analytical study of Islamic history exhibits these two motivations of travel clearly. Behind the story of Abraha's (the Christian king of Yemen) onslaught of Makkah<sup>5</sup>, to get materialistic lust by replacing the edifice of Ka'bah

<sup>1</sup> Al-Quran, 2: 30

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 2: 35

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 2: 38

<sup>4</sup> It is one of the popular cities of Arabia, where the international Airport of Saudi Arabia lies.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Quran, 105

at Makkah with Sinai is evident. The *Hijrah*<sup>6</sup>(Migration) of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, on the other side, however, demonstrates (religious/spiritual purpose) complete submission to Allah's will and the propagation of Islam. Therefore, such ideas of travel and the notion of tourism continued that later on assumed the form of conventional and religious forms of tourism in the modern world. The research on nature and Significance of religious Travel/Tourism (in context of Spirituality/Sufism) is less attenuated by Muslim scholars especially theologians. Hence lacks profound published literature. The present study depicts much relevance as is meant to examine and analyze the Islamic concept of tourism in spiritual perspective with special reference to the travels of Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani, particularly of his Kashmir travels.

### Travel in Sufi Literature

The idea of travel holds paramount importance in the whole discourse of *Tasawwuf*/Sufism. Sufis are always wandering in far-off places. The physical movement of Sufis from place to place is well-known to many but the spiritual movement from station to station in terms of the spiritual state of heart is mostly the matter of concern for those who are in practice. Sufis, in the whole of history, have always preferred to their physical movements in the horizontal direction and vertically in the spiritual aspect. Hence, to consider Sufism/spirituality in exclusion with tourism notion is actually of no value. Nodoubt, some Sufis preferred to live at their domestic places and travelled only for performing the obligatory duty of *Hajj*, but most of them travelled and considered travelling an imperative part of spiritual elevation. The descriptions about such travels are fully evident in the works of prominent Sufis—written on the subject of *Tasawwuf*. Primary works on *Tasawwuf* like *Kitab al-Lumah* of Abu Nasr Siraaj, *Risalai Qushariyah* of Imam Qushari, *Kimiya-e-Sa'adat* of Imam Ghazali etc discuss' fully; issues, patterns, and etiquettes of travel along with its significance in *Tasawwuf*. These works contain separate chapters on "etiquettes of travel".

The description of travel and its significance in *Tasawwuf* is evident from the excerpts of the above mentioned works. All these works contain the statements of high caliber Sufis that demonstrate the significance of tourism within the context of Sufism. According to Abu Nasr, Abu'l Hassan Muzzayin says; it is the sign of a saint (*Faqir*) to be in a new place every day and if died, dies in between two distances"<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, Shibli, when locating any of his companions disconnect himself from travel, used to say as; alas, you are trying to debunk him from that, which is impossible<sup>8</sup>.

Travel in *Tasawwuf* is, however, considered as fundamental for achieving a higher degree of Gnosticism (*Ma'rifat bi al-Allah*)<sup>9</sup> and is verily experiencing exercise among almost all Sufi Silsilas—to travel in the way of Allah (*Fi-Sabil al-Allah*)<sup>10</sup>. To travel in forests, deserts or mountains and spent a portion of life in

<sup>6</sup> The *Hijrah* implies to the migration of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) from Makkah to Medina in 622 which forms the first *Hijri* Calender in Islamic era.

<sup>77</sup>Siraaj, Abu Nasr. 2002. *Kiatb al-Lumah fi Tasawwuf*, Urdu Transl., Sayyid Asrar Bukhari. A'tiqaad Publishing House, Delhi, P. 305

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Idem----

<sup>10</sup>*Jihad* (Holy War) in Islam is called as the tourism of Muslims by Prophet of Islam. See Nasai Sherrif by Imam Nasai.

caves, asocial, however, is considered indispensable by Sufis for piousness of heart (*Tazkiy-e-Nafs*)<sup>11</sup>. Besides these, the missionary work of Islam<sup>12</sup> compelled Sufis saints for tourism to different parts of the world in order to call people towards the way of Allah (*Fi Sabilika*), which is impossible without travel. In fact, Islamic patterns and commands of travel are consideration and contemplation—practiced by Sufis.

Therefore, the significance of tourism in Sufism is quite evident. It is considered as a mechanism to elevate the spiritual state of a Sufi to the higher level of Gnosticism and for the propagation of Islam to the global world. Further, to remain isolated from the people who used to consider Sufis as the supernatural or anything like that, tourism freed them from all which may cause any kind of hindrance in their Sufi path.

Unlike conventional Tourism, the Sufi perspective of Travel is *Sharia*’ adhered and is done by Novices (*Mureed*) according to the proper guidelines of a Preceptor (*Murshid*). Therefore, travel of such nature has two manifestations, according to Sufis; one is Physical Travel and the other is Travel of Heart. The former means to Travel from one place to another place and the latter means transformation of heart from one state to another level.<sup>13</sup> Travels of both nature are evident in the lives of Sufis.

### Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani: Personality Assessment

Undoubtedly, Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani (1314—1385 C.E.) popularly known in Kashmir as *Shah-i-Hamadan* or *Amir-i-Kabir* was one of the reputed scholar and Sufi of his time.<sup>14</sup> Whose scholarship left a valuable treasure of knowledge in the form of multi-lingual books and brochures (*Rasaa’l*). He was a great Social reformer, Political thinker and an erudite scholar, besides a Sufi and an ‘*Alim*, whose impact is still observed in every corner of the Kashmir valley. From Religio-spiritual to socio-political and economic aspects of life—the influence of Hamadani can’t be undermined. It is he, who after Syed Sharaf-ud-Din propagated and consolidated Islam in Kashmir. The spiritual personality of Hamadani transformed the polytheistic society of Kashmir in monotheistic one, *Kali Shore* temple into *Khanqah-i-Mu’alla* within a short span of time.

He was the man who left the ancestral legacy of the governorship and devoted his whole life to the contemplation of God and in the considerations of human welfare including the propagation of Islam. All became possible due to the travels, he made, in the course of his life. The life history of Hamadani and the contribution, he championed in, is spread in far-off places and still can be observed in different parts of the

<sup>11</sup>See the Biographies of Sufi Saints of Muslim World.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Quran, 3: 110

<sup>13</sup>Qushari, Abu’l Qasim Abdul Karim bin Hawazin. (n.d.). *Risala-i-Qusharia*. Transl., Dr. Peer Muahaamd Hassan, Islamic Publishers, Delhi, P. 548.

<sup>14</sup> The author had compiled M.Phil Dissertation on the Life and Contribution of Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani besides some papers as well where in the description is evident regarding the life history of Him. In order to get rid of from the repetition, there is hardly any need to repeat that. Therefore, I suggest, for the readers to refer to the below mentioned works for the full details of the life of Hamadani; *Shah-i-Hamadan’s Concept of Tawhid with Special Reference to Awwad-i-Fathiyya* by Sartaj Ahmad Sofi, M.Phil Dissertation (Unpublished), *Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies*, University of Kashmir, Srinager, 2016; *Awwad-i-Fathiyyah: The Compendium of ‘Aqa’id-o-Wazaif*, Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies Research (AJHISR), Vol. 13, Issue-1, Jan-17 to Jun-17, p. 51-66.

world. The exhaustive travels of Hamadani provided a place to the scholars of India and Central Asia, even to both these countries to demonstrate their contacts on diverse spheres of life. It is mostly due to his personality; today we often debate the Indo-Central Asian relations. The fact can be still observed in the whole valley of Kashmir where some people are still solely dependent on those kinds of economic industries which have their origin in Central Asia or where brought by Hamadani to Kashmir. Therefore, we can rightly claim that Hamadani ornamented Kashmir with Islam and also bridged Indo-Central Asian relations.

### Hamadani's Journeys

It is established altruism that Mir Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani travelled extensively to the world. The term '*Rab' Maskoon*' has been associated with describing the travels of Hamadani which has pure geographical connotation implies to 'the then known world'. On the other side, Hamadani started his esoteric travels initiated under the guidance of his maternal uncle<sup>15</sup> and reached its zenith under the subordination of Shaikh Mahmud Muzdaqani and Shaikh TaqiAkhi Ali Dosti<sup>16</sup>. The personality and the travels of Hamadani resulted in the transformation of Kashmir from Hinduism to Islam, to which Prof. Ishaq Khan refers as 'Kashmir's transition to Islam'<sup>17</sup>, in his famous work penned down on the subject of Islam in Kashmir. Hamadani's travels both in physical and spiritual perspectives contributed a lot in his mission of Kashmir's transition to Islam.

### Physical Journeys:

Regarding the physical movements from central Asia to different parts of the world, Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani had visited numerous places in his life. He made extensive travels in the Muslim and non-Muslim regions of the world. Being an ardent propagator of Islam and a practicing Sufi of his time, he signifies travelling/tourism as an essential component of Islamic spirituality. He, under the guidance and order of his preceptor—Shaikh Mahmood Muzdaqani, physically travelled to a number of places. He travelled extensively in 21 years the then known inhabited world. He was not just a tourist (Conventional one) like that of Marco polo and Ibn Battuta. His travels were meant especially for the purpose of spirituality and religious considerations. He added new horizons to his education through these travels. He is said to have performed *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah) twelve times<sup>18</sup> which also describes his utmost love for God and His apostle. An analysis of his close disciple namely, Nur-ud-Din Ja'ffar confirms many places that were visited by Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani during these travels such as Mozdaqan, Khatlan, Balkh, Badakhshan,

<sup>15</sup>Badakshi, Nur-ud-Din Ja'far. 2003. *Khulast-ul-Manaqib*, (Urdu Transl.), Prof. Shams-ud-Din Ahmad, Gulshan Publishers and Exposters, Srinager, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> At the age of twelve years old, His maternal uncle then introduced him to Shaikh Mahmud Mazdaqani, Who after teaching him elementary principles of Sufism, sent him to Taqui'd Din Ali Dusti (d. 733 or 739A.H) a disciple of Alau'dDaulaSimnani. Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani remained with his new teacher for about two years, and after his death he returned to Shaikh Muzdaqani who put the finishing touches to his education. (Jami, Abdul Rahman; *Nafahat-ul-Uns*, p. 290; See Also Sartaj, M.Phil Dissertation, op. cit).

<sup>17</sup> Khan, Mohammad Ishaq. 1997. *Kashmir's Transition to Islam*, Manohar.

<sup>18</sup>Badakshi, Nur -ud-Din Ja'far. 2003. *Khulasat-ul-Manaqib* (Urdu Transl.), Prof. Shams-ud-Din Ahmad, Gulshan Publishers and Exposters, Srinager, p. 186.

Khata, Yezd, Syria, Baghdad, Hijaz, Rome, Turkistan (*Mawara-un-Nahr*) Sarendeep (Sri-Lanka) etc. He also journeyed to India and Ladakh. During his travels, throughout the Muslim world, he met many eminent Sufis. Some prominent Sufis among them are as under:

- Sayyid Shah WaliKirmani (d. 834 A.H)
- Shaikh YahyaMuniri (d. 782 A.H)
- Shaikh Muhammad bin AzkaniAsfarani (d. 778 A.H)
- HadratMakhdoomJahanianJhangustBukhari (d. 787 A.H)
- Sayyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani (d. 808 A.H)

Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani is reported to have travelled three times over the whole known world and met 1400 Sufis and ‘*Ulama*’<sup>19</sup>. He himself comments about his travels in the following words:

سه بار از مشرق تا مغرب سفر کردم بسی عجاب دیدم در حار طلاب با وفاق را که در اطراف دنیا در بحرو بر دیده شدوهر بار که شهری ولایتی باشند را شاد نمایم زیرا که در اقامت این نو دیدم رسم و عادت اهل آن موضع طریق دیگر استفاضه، اوقاصه، میر نگر و<sup>20</sup>

### Hamadani’s Kashmir Visits

Speaking purely in tourism context, Kashmir has been the home for all from archaic times. People belong to different corners of the world used to visit Kashmir mostly for its natural beauty and due to the utmost hospitality of the inhabitants of the valley. It still depicts the most beautiful valley in the world that attracts millions of visitors every year. Recent political instability has somehow hindered such flow of tourists but still the valley is ornamented throughout the year with diverse tourists.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century *hijrah* Mir Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani visited Kashmir. He was accompanied with almost 700 companions (*Sadaat*). He is said to have visited the valley three times as per one view and only once as opines some of the historians.<sup>21</sup> It is established that Hamadani remained confined in and around the capital city of Srinagar. But the activities spread distant parts of the valley mostly through his companions that were deputed to different places. The established khanqahs which still marks the significant places for the tourists of spiritual taste are found in and outside the city. Among them, the four are more popular in the whole valley of Kashmir. These are *Khanqah-i-Mu‘allah*, *Khaqah-i-Faiz Panah Tral*, Pulwama; *Khanqahi* of Wachi, Shopian; *Khanqahi* of Dooru Anantnag.

<sup>19</sup> Amin Ahmad Razi. *Haft-i-Iqlim*. MS. Punjab University, pp. 540-44.

<sup>20</sup> Badakhshi, op. cit., p. 169, (Quoted from Persian text of Sayyidah Ashraf Zafer’s edited copy of *Khulasat al-Manaqib*).

<sup>21</sup> There is debate among the historians regarding the visits of Hamadani to Kashmir. Some scholars are of the opinion that Hamadani came to Kashmir thrice while as others believe that he came only once. Those scholars who supported the former view are Pir Hassan Shah Khuiyhami, Miskin, Mohi-ud-Din and Muhibbu’l Hassan. Those who found the latter view more appropriate are Mirza Haider Doughlat and Abu’lFazl, Rafi’-ud-Din Ahmad and Haider Malik.

Another significant aspect which always remained a matter of debate among the historians is the enquiry about the motivation of Hamadani for Kashmir visit. In the Hamadani era, Kashmir was religiously dominated by Hindus which provides least justification for Hamadani to visit there instead of journeying to Muslim majority domains, Saudi Arabia of that time can be exemplified well in this regard. The ruler of Timur of that time in Persia and his attitude towards the *Alavi* sayyids also contributed in the debate and provided historians a mechanism to enquire about the facts. Therefore, for obvious reasons, two approaches were put forth that categorized the historians and also describes the matter in two opposite directions. Some of them consider it the victimization of Timur while others as the mission of Islam.<sup>22</sup> An evaluation of the sources of history which majority of the scholars believe is that the main purpose of his Kashmir visit was nothing but Islamic propagation. It is due to his relentless efforts that Islam was established in the valley. He came to the valley from pirpanjal, remained here for a short span and departed the valley via Ladakh.

### Spiritual Journey

Journeying spiritually deals with the esoteric aspect of a person. The manifestations of it are identified on two bases. At one point, it refers to the state of heart. Here, the physique remains totally absent. The physical movement from a place to another hardly matters. But at another point, it refers to the inwardly physical journey. Here physique of the traveler matters but inwardly. Regarding the first one, here a person journeys through many spiritual stages without moving from the place stayed. These movements' remains confined to the state of heart only. It is that state about which Prophet Muhammad ﷺ deliberated in a famous tradition known as *Hadith Jibreel*. He has been questioned about *Ihsan*. He replied as; "To worship God as if you saw Him; for if you see Him not, He assuredly sees you."<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the second one, where a traveler travels physically to a particular destination but whole action of tourism takes place inwardly. There is no plausible physical movement. Here, the seeker performs physical actions while having in any state of spiritual journey. Islamic history comprises various examples of such kind of travels where one reaches to places that are otherwise impossible to reach.

Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas: The sun eclipsed in the life of the Prophet (pbuh). Allah's apostle offered the eclipse prayer and stood for a long period equal to the period in which one could recite Surat al-Baqara. Then he bowed for a long time and then stood up for a long period which was shorter than that of the first standing, then bowed again for a long time but for a shorter period than the first; then he prostrated twice and then stood for a long period which was shorter than that of the first standing; then he bowed for a long time which was shorter than the previous one, and then he raised his head and stood up for a long period which was shorter than the first standing, then he

<sup>22</sup> M. Phil Dissertation, Sartaj, Op. Cit., p. 40-45.

<sup>23</sup> Narrated by Imam Muslim in his *Sahih: Kitab al-Iman, Bab Ma`rifat al-Iman wal-Islam wal-Qadarwa `Alamat al-Sa`a*, 1/36, no. 8; and by Imam Bukhari in his *Sahih: Kitab al-Iman, Bab Su'alJibril al-NabiSallaAllahu `alayhiwaSallam `an al-Iman wal-Islam wal-Ihsanwa `Ilm al- Sa`a*, 1/19, no. 50.

bowed for a long time which was shorter than the first bowing, and then prostrated (twice) and finished the prayer. By then, the sun (eclipse) had cleared. The Prophet then said, the sun and the moon are two of the signs of Allah. They eclipse neither because of the death of somebody nor because of his life (i.e. birth). So when you see them, remember Allah. **The people say, O Allah's Apostle! We saw you taking something from your place and then we saw you retreating. The Prophet replied, I saw paradise and stretched my hands towards a bunch (of its fruits) and had I taken it, you would have eaten from it as long as the world remains.** I also saw the hell-fire and I had never seen such a horrible sight. I saw that most of the inhabitants were women. Then people asked, O Allah's Apostle! Why is it so? The Prophet replied, Because of their ungratefulness. It was asked whether they are ungrateful to Allah. The Prophet said, they are ungrateful to their companions of life (husbands) and ungrateful to good deeds. If you are benevolent to one of them throughout the life and if she sees anything (undesirable) in you, she will say, 'I have never had any good from you.'<sup>24</sup>

Considering the spiritual personality of Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani within the context of both the above mentioned aspects of spiritual journeys (spiritual tourism), he was deployed in high position. He, from the very beginning of his life, started a spiritual journey. The whole credit goes to his uncle Ala-ud-Daula Simnani who guided him first in the voyage of spirituality. Later on, he sends him to a great spiritual teacher of his time namely Mahmood Muzdaqani who for a time being send him to Akhi Dosti. Under such high caliber preceptors, generally, it can be inferred from his treatises that spiritual journeys begins from *Taubah* (the state of the consideration of the smallness of man and the greatness of God) and the highest state is the state of *Riza* (state of devotion to God's will).<sup>25</sup> Hamadani accomplished his spiritual journey. He had succeeded to attain a level of high degree in spiritual journeys which he inherited to his descendents as well. He time and again used to advice his disciples about the states of spirituality and the methods how to reach there.

The inward physical journey of Hamadani can be derived from the imprints of his famous poetic diction popularly known as *Chihal Asrar*. The very event, associated with Hamadani, of accepting the invitation from forty of his disciples and reaching to all places at a moment while sitting plausibly at home illustrates the notion of inwardly physical journeys of Hamadani.<sup>26</sup> But often, it becomes hard to believe and understand it rationally in isolation of spiritual practices.

<sup>24</sup>Bukhari, Imam, *Bukhari Sherriff*, Chapter (18): Eclipses, H. No. 1052; The Hadith has also been mentioned in other Hadith books like *Muslim-627/2*, *SunanNasai-147/3*, *Muwatta Imam Malik-186/1*, *Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal-298/1*, *SahihIbn Hibban-73/7* etc.

<sup>25</sup> The whole idea of spiritual journey of Hamadani can be extracted well from the works of Hamadani like *Risla Dah Qa'idah*, *Chahal Asrar*, *Maqmat-i-Sufia*, *Maraatib-ul-Mu'rifat* etc.

<sup>26</sup>See; Hamadani, Mir Sayyid 'Ali, *Chahal Asrar*.

The spiritual form of journey what this study proposes as inward physical journey is complex but highly abstractive in nature. Hence is incomprehensible to perceive easily. Due to its complexity and the material dominion, it exhibits less attention by academicians to discuss. Mostly, it remained the matter of concerns among the Sufi circles especially in highly stated practicing Sufis of the time.

### **Conclusion**

Though the concept of religious tourism is new, the idea of travel motivated by religion is as old as the religions itself. Religious tourism has two forms in the context of Islamic spirituality. One is the physical movement from one place to another place. The second one constitutes two ways; spiritual state of heart and the inward physical journey. Mir Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani—an ardent scholar of Islam and a great Sufi master of his time made extensive travels in all respects that purviews in the context of religious/spiritual tourism. The main motivation behind these travels was religious/spiritual and the sole purpose behind was the Gnosticism and religious propagation.

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