

Final Report: AIPS Junior Fellowship Junior Research Fellowship

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Purpose: Archival Research

My dissertation investigates the early modern understandings of three Kashmiri saints who continue to hold a prominent place in debates regarding Kashmir's cultural heritage and social belonging: 'Ali Hamadani, Lal Ded, and Nund Rishi. Through an analysis of the hagiographical, historical, and other related court documents of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, I examine the focus upon asceticism and gendered bodily practices of these saints as formulating joined paradigms of sanctity and political power for the courts and religious institutions of the sixteenth through seventeenth centuries.

A number of scholars, especially Sirs George Grierson, Richard Carnac Temple, and Marc Aurel Stein, worked for or through the British colonial administration to conduct research on late medieval and early modern Kashmir, and as such, the British Library and Oxford University's Bodleian Library hold most of the records and correspondences related to their work. Furthermore, these libraries hold substantial collections of medieval and early modern Kashmiri, Persian, and Sanskrit manuscripts from Kashmir. Thus, my research was roughly divided between the collecting and reading of the earliest and most relevant manuscripts on early modern Kashmir and evaluating how these previous scholars conducted their own research on this earlier time period. While the majority of my time was spent reading the early modern manuscripts, examining the personal papers of Grierson, Temple, and Stein allowed me to reevaluate the methods and intellectual premises that framed their conclusions but are otherwise obscured in the final publications of their work. For example, Sir George Grierson relied upon Kashmiri Pandit Mukund Ram Shastri, an employee of the Dogra Maharaja's Archeological and Research Department, as his research assistant in Srinagar. During this research, Shastri lost much of his initial work on Lal Ded's poetry when his house burnt down, and he was under criminal investigation by the Maharaja due to his supervisor's alleged embezzlement and general malfeasance. Such information enhances the understanding of these previous scholars' work and warrants a reappraisal of the confident claims and interpretations asserted in their publications.

At the British Library, I was able to examine their collection of manuscripts composed in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries Kashmir. Of the hagiographical manuscripts, the *Wird al-Muridin* contains the earliest known accounts of the Rishi Order of Sufis, a native-Kashmiri, ascetically-oriented Sufi *silsilah* founded by Nund Rishi, one of the most celebrated saintly figures who lived during the Kashmiri Sultanate. This text, along with many other of the early hagiographical accounts of Kashmiri Sufis at the British Library, such as the *Hilyat al-'Arifin* and the *Rishi-namah*, celebrate the Sunni-leaning Sufi Orders of Kashmir and the Kashmiri nobility who patronized them and demonstrate an opposition to the Shi'a-leaning Nurbakhshi Sufi missionary Shamsuddin Araki and his patrons, the Chak Sultans. In contrast, the historical chronicle *Baharistan-i-Shahi* celebrates the Shi'a nobility and saints of Kashmir. These

documents are invaluable for developing a thorough understanding of the interrelations among competing religious and political groups and has allowed me to begin deciphering how social power was configured therein, a central issue in the continued development of my dissertation project.

The Bodleian Library's two earliest manuscripts of the poetry of Lal Ded, the most acclaimed Shaiva saint of the Kashmiri Sultanate, illustrate how she navigated her changing social and political landscape. Muslim leaders like Nund Rishi revered her and were instrumental in shaping her image through the selective preservation of her compositions. Furthermore, when read in conjunction with the Sanskrit royal chronicles of the Kashmiri Sultanate, these collections of Lal Ded's poetry may indicate how the Shaiva community refashioned themselves during this period as well. By tracing networks of alliances among religious institutions, saints, nobility, and sultans along with shifts in religious and political paradigms in these manuscripts, I have begun to tease out the dynamics of religious and political power that articulate in the legacies of these saints in early modern Kashmir. Without the generous support of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, I would not have been able to take advantage of the vast and valuable resources available in London and Oxford that are vital to my research project.