

The Negative Theology of Nund Rishi (1378-1440): Poetry and Politics in Medieval  
Kashmir

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

On May 25, 1995, at the end of a two-month long siege, the shrine and tomb-complex (*astān*) of Nund Rishi (1378-1440), Kashmir's most revered Sufi and the founder of a fifteenth century Kashmiri Sufi Order called the Rishi Order, was destroyed in a gun battle between the militants of the *Hizb al- Mujahidīn*, a pro-Pakistan Kashmiri guerilla group, and the Indian Army.<sup>1</sup> The *Hizb al- Mujahidīn* and the Indian Army kept accusing each other of destroying one of the most popular Sufi shrines of Kashmir even as most Kashmiris retreated into shocked silence and mourning. The gratuitous destruction of a revered Sufi shrine, a centre of Kashmiri Rishism, epitomized the everyday fate of Kashmiris in the early 1990s at the receiving end of a low-intensity war between India and the different Kashmiri nationalist, pro-Pakistan and Islamist groups over the future of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The Central Kashmir town of Charar was also destroyed in the gun battle. It is in Charar that Kashmiri nationalists had gathered in March 1990 at the beginning of an armed insurgency to demand self-determination and vow to struggle for *azādi* (freedom): a demonstration that also cost many Kashmiri lives. The shrine at Charar symbolized the distinctive history of Islam in Kashmir for some (in another variant, a form of the multi-religious, even syncretic, *Kashmīriyat*, or Kashmiriness) or the beginnings of Islam and Islamic culture in Kashmir for the others. Nonetheless the Charar shrine was, and remains, clearly one of the most sacred religious spaces for Kashmiris. It is no surprise then that the pro-independence Kashmiri

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Burns, "Muslim Shrine in Kashmir is Destroyed," *New York Times*, May 12, 1995, accessed June 25, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/12/world/muslim-shrine-in-kashmir-is-destroyed.html>.

nationalists (or Kashmiri nationalists who are pro-India), pro-Pakistan Islamists, and the Indian State (with its official ideology of secularism at the cornerstone of its claim on Kashmir) all lay claim to Chrar as a centre of Rishi thinking and philosophy. But neither the Kashmiri nationalists, Kashmiri Islamists or the Indian State have articulated any serious understanding of the religio-political movement of the saint who lies buried at Chrar. This movement known in the later Urdu scholarship as the *Rishī tahrīk* or in English scholarship as the Rishi movement has been a unique phenomenon in the history of religion in Kashmir soon after the advent of Islam there in the fourteenth century. What makes Nund Rishi and his movement so fundamental to Kashmiri ideas of self, faith, sovereignty, and loss? This is one of the questions we would like to examine in this dissertation through a reading of Nund Rishi's mystical poetry itself.

Kashmir is a disputed territory and the region remains divided between India and Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> The claims of both India and Pakistan on Kashmir depend on the way these two nation-states approach its status as a Muslim-majority region (for India, the inclusion of Kashmir as a Muslim-majority region in the Union of States ratifies its official ideology of secularism; for Pakistan, a country created as a homeland for South Asia's Muslims, the State's Muslim-majority status is the cornerstone of its political claim on the region). It is not at all surprising then that the history of Islam in Kashmir is a controversial subject. The Rishis, central to Kashmir's transition from a Hindu-Buddhist society to an Islamic society from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, are fundamental to that history. Nevertheless, most accounts of the Rishis in Kashmir have focused on

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the erstwhile territory of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, a princely State in British India, is controlled by China.

religious and political history and few have examined the thinking of Nund Rishi. There have been a few book-length studies of the history of the Rishi Order of Kashmiri Sufism but of these Muhammad Ishaq Khan's *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* remains the most influential even if controversial.<sup>3</sup> The collections of Nund Rishi's mystical poetry have also been published since the arrival of the printing press in Kashmir in the early twentieth century. But there has been no detailed critical study of the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi. Nund Rishi left behind no written records or mystical theology except his mystical poetry. In this dissertation, I explore the thinking of the founder of the Rishi Order, Nund Rishi, as it is expressed in his mystical poetry. I focus, in particular, on the themes of death, the Nothing, the apocalyptic, and Islam in the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi in order to trace a complex history of the relations between mysticism and politics in the region which complicates our understanding of the beginnings of Islam in Kashmir (the history I retrieve here resists either a nationalist or Islamist appropriation in the history of the present). A more nuanced understanding of the Rishi movement can also yield new resources for thinking about the political impasse in Kashmir. My reading of the themes of death (Chapter 2), the nothing (Chapter 3), the apocalyptic (Chapter 4) and Islam in Nund Rishi (Chapter 5) discloses Nund Rishi's thinking as an irruption of negative theology in the religious and political firmament of medieval Kashmir.

The history of Islam in Kashmir, and the role played in it by the Rishi Order of Kashmiri Sufism, has attracted some attention in recent years because of the persistence

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* (Delhi: Manohar, 1994).

of the violent conflict in Kashmir. Kashmir is the site of the oldest and most dangerous political conflicts in South Asia. The nuclear-armed States of India and Pakistan have already fought two wars over the future of Kashmir and came perilously close to a third war (in 1999 and 2002). The genesis of the conflict and its trajectory is in itself a complex subject.<sup>4</sup> The dispute over Kashmir can be traced back to the moment of the birth of the two nation-States of India and Pakistan in 1947. The modern State of Jammu and Kashmir, a feudal, princely State of British India, had emerged at the end of the Anglo-Sikh war with military help from the British.<sup>5</sup> This was hardly the coherent political entity it appears in retrospect. Kashmiris never accepted the legitimacy of this rule and agitated against the Jammu-based ruling Dogra monarchy from the late nineteenth century. But it was only in the 1930s, after a massacre of protesting Kashmiris by the Dogra State, that Kashmiris launched a popular movement for sovereignty that also received support from prominent Indian nationalists agitating against the British colonial rule. This movement was interrupted by the Partition of British India and rapidly unfolding events in its aftermath (communal strife which spread from Punjab into the Jammu region, the revolt against the Dogras in Poonch and the arrival of the Indian Army on 26 October 1947 in Kashmir ostensibly to ward off Muslim tribal irregulars from Western Pakistan backed by the Pakistan Army, the first India-Pakistan war of 1947-48 and another war in 1965), and the State of Jammu and Kashmir was eventually divided between India and Pakistan (India retained control over the scenic Kashmir Valley).

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the origins and history of this conflict, see Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1992); A G Noorani, *The Kashmir Dispute 1947-2012 Volume 1 and 2* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> A G Noorani, *The Kashmir Dispute Volume 1947-2012 Volume 1* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2013), 4-5.

Generation after generation of young Kashmiris faced routine political suppression since the 1930s as the anti-Dogra movement metamorphosed into a nationalist movement demanding self-determination. Even though there were tensions in the region in the 1950s and the 1960s, things had settled into an uneasy calm in the late 1970s and the early 1980s with the defeat of Pakistan in the India-Pakistan war of 1971. But the barely suppressed unrest in Indian-administered Kashmir, riding on a wave of new Islamist sentiment after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, exploded into a violent anti-India insurgency in 1990, which continues unabated and has already claimed more than 75, 000 lives. The killings, extrajudicial executions, rape, torture and disappearances are only some of the more visible signs of death and destruction in contemporary Kashmir. Most of Kashmir's Hindu minority has been displaced from the Valley and lives in exile.<sup>6</sup>

What is of significance to us here is the persistence of the symbolic centrality of Kashmir to the postcolonial States of India and Pakistan (not only in politics but also in culture), which is one of the fundamental causes of the intransigence of the conflict. If Kashmir is the crowning example, for India, of its distinctive secularism; for Pakistan, it is the unfinished business of India's Partition that led to the creation of an independent homeland for India's Muslims. The interminable shadow war between India and

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<sup>6</sup> Saiba Verma writes in a recent article: "In addition to being the site of ongoing violence and political unrest...Kashmir has also emerged as a zone of mass psychological suffering. Media reports highlight the fact that Kashmir has one of the highest rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the world, with approximately one-third of the population exhibiting traumatic symptoms...Similarly, a 2006 report by Human Rights Watch entitled, 'Everyone Lives in Fear,' describes an 'epidemic of trauma' underway because of sustained human rights abuses." Saiba Varma, "Where There are only Doctors: Counselors as Psychiatrists in Indian-Administered Kashmir," *Ethos*, Vol. 40, Issue 4: 520.

Pakistan, which has often spilled over into other regions, has done little to diminish the Kashmiri national sentiment and struggle for self-determination. The political claims on the region of both India and Pakistan not only go back to the tumultuous events of the Partition of British India discussed above but also pass through the history and memory of the sectarian conflict between the Hindus and Muslims of South Asia. For Kashmiris, negotiating the bitter legacy of this Hindu-Muslim sectarian conflict has involved making sense of a complex history of the religious and the political in Kashmir. Kashmir was one of the few regions in South Asia like Punjab, Sindh, and Bengal which had seen large-scale conversion from Hinduism to Islam. The history of Islam in Kashmir has been fundamental to the negotiations of the cultural pasts in Kashmir. But even the regional history of Islam in Kashmir remains deeply contested. It is the significance of the Rishi Order to most historical accounts about medieval Kashmir that places Nund Rishi, and his Rishi Order of Sufism, at the centre of controversies and contestations about the history of Islam in Kashmir. The Indian State, for instance, has often cast the Rishi Order as the forerunner of its ideology of secularism in discourses that surround such symbolic gestures as the naming of the Srinagar airport as the *Shaikh al-‘Ālam* airport (*Shaikh al-‘Ālam* – the teacher, or wisdom, of the world – is one among the many epithets with which Kashmiris remember Nund Rishi). For the Pakistani State, Kashmiri Sufism appears in continuity with the practices of imagining a South Asian Muslim Paradise.<sup>7</sup>

The role played by the *Kubrāwiyyā* Sufis in the conversion of Kashmir to Islam prompted the former President of Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq, to eulogize the work of the

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<sup>7</sup> Such imaginings of Pakistan as harbinger of Islam’s renewal in South Asia were crucial to the campaign for its achievement. See also Venkat Dhulipala, *State Power, Islam and the quest for Pakistan in late colonial North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

*Kubrāwīyyā* Sufi missionary, Mīr Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī (popularly also remembered as *Shāh-e Hamadān*, the King of Hamadan), in a Conference organized in Pakistan-administered Kashmir in 1987 (interestingly the year the first few groups of young Kashmiris began crossing over to the Pakistan-administered Kashmir to prepare for an anti-India insurgency).<sup>8</sup> As Gen. Zia-ul-Haq reiterated, without men like Mīr Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī, “we would have had not Pakistan today nor Azad Jammu and Kashmir.”<sup>9</sup> Most historical accounts of Kashmir are in agreement that the *Kubrāwīyyā* Sufi missionaries catalysed conversions to Islam in Kashmir, even though it is also clear that Mīr Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī’s role is often exaggerated. As we will see, the Rishi Order of Kashmiri Sufism had a different approach to Islam in Kashmir than the *Kubrāwīyyā* Sufis, and the Rishi movement was not actively involved in religious conversions.

The situation in relation to representations of the history of Islam in Kashmir has been no different for India. In 2009, for instance, India’s then President, Pratibha Patil, invoked Kashmiri Sufism on an official visit to Kashmir as she called Kashmir the abode of the Rishis and a symbol of “liberal values, religious harmony, mutual co-existence and brotherhood.”<sup>10</sup> For India, Kashmir is the trophy of its triumphant secularism and the Rishi movement a forerunner of its secularism. The Kashmiri nationalists, in turn, see Nund Rishi as one of the first Kashmiri spiritual leaders to express the national sentiment

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<sup>8</sup> Gen. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, “Inaugural Address” in *Shah-e-Hamadan: Amir Kabir Sayyid Ali Hamadani* (AH 714-786), editor M Sarwar Abbasi (Muzaffrabad: Institute of Kashmir Studies, 1991), 19. Azad Jammu and Kashmir is the territory of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir now under Pakistani control. Gen. Zia-ul-Haq said in his inaugural address about the *Kubrāwīyyā* Sufi missionary: “...today when we are free and independent and we hold our head high...it is primarily due to the wonderful achievements of great men like Shah-e-Hamadan.” Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>10</sup> Faheem Aslam, “After Weilding Gun, President talks Kashmiriyat,” *Greater Kashmir*, May 27 2008, 1.

of the oppressed in Kashmir.<sup>11</sup> Divided between a loyalty to the Pakistani State and a future, post-*jihād* Caliphate, the Kashmiri Islamists have a complex, but not always uneasy, relationship with Kashmiri Sufism. Yet central to most of these narratives about the history of Islam in Kashmir is the Rishi Order of Kashmiri Sufism.

Much of our information about the Rishi Order, and Nund Rishi, is based on accounts written by the Sufis of the *Suhrawardī* and *Qadirī* Orders. None of these are contemporaneous to Nund Rishi. But if the Sufis of other Orders (in some senses, the rival Orders for the Rishis) held the Rishis in such great esteem, one can only imagine the extent of their popularity in Kashmir.<sup>12</sup> The Kashmiri historian Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi draws our attention to the accounts of awe and veneration inspired by the Rishis among Kashmiris in Mughal courtier Abul Fazl's *Ā'īn-e Akbarī* in the reign of Akbar and in *Tuzuk-e Jahāngīrī* by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1569-1627). Writing about a century and a half after Nund Rishi's death, Abul Fazl gives us this account of the enduring popularity of the Rishi Order at the time of the Mughal annexation of Kashmir under Akbar (the Mughals conquered Kashmir in 1586):

The most respected class of people in this country (Kashmir) are the Rishis. Although they have not abandoned the traditional and customary forms of worship (*taqlīd*), but they are true in their worship. They do not denounce men belonging to different faiths. They do not have the tongue of desire, and do not seek to attain worldly objects. They plant fruit-bearing trees in order that people may obtain benefit from these. They abstain from meat and do not marry.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The leader of the pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Yasin Malik, often begins his speeches in rural Kashmir with a few lines from Nund Rishi's mystical poetry.

<sup>12</sup> Sufism arrived in Kashmir at a time of intense rivalries between different Sufi Orders that had become institutionalized by the fourteenth century. For a history of the rise and development of Sufi Orders in the medieval period, see J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (Sydney: Goodword Media, 2003), 236-237.

In the memoirs of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1569-1627), *Jahāngīrnāmā*, we come across a similar reference to the Rishis:

There is a group of fakirs called *rishis*. Although they have no knowledge or learning, they profess simplicity and unpretentiousness and speak ill of no one. They do not beg or practice mendicancy. They do not eat meat, and they do not take wives. They plant fruit-bearing trees in the wilderness with the intention that people might enjoy the fruits, although they themselves do not derive any enjoyment from the practice. There must be at least two thousand of these individuals.<sup>14</sup>

As we shall see, the “lack of knowledge” alludes here to controversies between Sufism and the dogma of various theologies which I shall discuss in Chapter 5. Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi also writes that the fifteenth century Kashmiri Sanskrit chronicler Jonaraja, “who rarely acknowledges the sanctity of any Muslim, describes him [Nund Rishi] the greatest sage of the time.”<sup>15</sup> Even though there is just one contemporaneous reference to Nund Rishi in Jonaraja’s *Rajātaringinī*, it is in the *tarīkhs* and *tadhkirās* of the different Persian Sufi Orders of Kashmir where we come across not only the first detailed accounts of Nund Rishi, but also examples from his mystical poetry.<sup>16</sup>

The history and memory of the Rishi Order is inseparable from its founder, Nund Rishi, and his mystical poetry. Nund Rishi, or Sheikh Nūr al-Dīn Nūrānī, is one of the most significant figures in the history of religion and literature in Kashmir. Many relatively contemporary historical and political commentators on Kashmir consider Nund Rishi to be Kashmir’s ‘patron saint,’ or even ‘national saint’; even as ‘patron saint’ and

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<sup>14</sup> *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, translated, edited and annotated by Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 334. The memoirs of Jahangir are commonly referred to as *Tuzūk-i-Jahāngīrī*, but Jahangir himself refers to his memoirs as *Jahāngīrnāma*. Ibid., ix.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> It is also in these *tarīkhs* and *tadhkirās* that we first encounter the biography and poetry of the Shaivite *yoginī* Lal Ded who inaugurates (with Nund Rishi) a vernacular literary culture in Kashmiri in the fourteenth and fifteenth century.

‘national saint’ remain hard, if not impossible, to translate into Kashmiri.<sup>17</sup> For Kashmiris themselves, Nund Rishi is simply ‘*Alamdār*’ (the standard-bearer, or flag bearer) of Kashmir or *Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (the teacher of the worlds). The Hindus of Kashmir remember Nund Rishi with the honorific *Sahajānanda* (the Blissful One) because he was believed by some to be an incarnation of the Buddha.<sup>18</sup> We shall discuss the significance of this epithet towards the end of Chapter 5. The word *rishī* itself is Sanskrit and means an ascetic or a sage. By choosing a Sanskrit word for ascetics to name an Islamic Sufi Order, Nund Rishi stressed continuities between Kashmir’s past and present in politically turbulent times. The popular culture that surrounds Rishi shrines in the present such as *bhānd pāthu’r* (Kashmiri folk theatre), *zūl* (a festival of lights), *dambāl* (dervish dance) is also associated with pre-Islamic religious culture in Kashmir.

From the medieval Sultanate to the modern Indian State in Kashmir, the rulers of Kashmir have attempted to capitalize on the popularity of the Rishis among Kashmiri masses.<sup>19</sup> But the discourse on the Rishis acquired more of a centrality in Kashmiri public

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<sup>17</sup> The Encyclopedia of Islam refers to Nund Rishi as Baba Nūr al-Dīn Rishī. Mohibbul Hasan, “Bābā Nūr al-Dīn Rishī”, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 19 June 2016 [http://dx.doi.org.ezp3.lib.umn.edu/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_8382](http://dx.doi.org.ezp3.lib.umn.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8382). Hasan writes: “Although a Muslim, he has been called *rishī*, because he was more influenced by the ideas and practices of the Hindu Sadhūs and Rishīs than by those of Muslim Šūfis and saints. From the age of thirty, Nūr al-Dīn began to withdraw to caves for meditation and prayers. He finally renounced the world and its pleasures and left his wife and children. In his last days he subsisted only on one cup of milk, and towards the end he took nothing except water, dying at the age of 63 in 842/1438. He is the patron saint of the Valley, and is greatly revered by its people. His sayings and mystical verses, like those of Lallā Ded, are sung and recited all over Kashmīr. His tomb in Črār, 20 miles south-west of Srinagar, attracts thousands of people, both Muslims and Hindus, every year” Ibid. Rafiqi gives 1440 as the year of Nund Rishi’s death. Most scholars accept the dates 1378 for Nund Rishi’s birth and 1440 for Nund Rishi’s death, even if there is some disagreement about 1377 or 1378 as the year of Nund Rishi’s birth.

<sup>18</sup> G N Gauhar, *Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali (Nund Rishi)* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 61-62.

<sup>19</sup> The Rishis were so popular in Kashmir that the Afghan Governor of Kashmir, ‘Atā Muhammad Khan, struck coins in the name of Nund Rishi in the early nineteenth century. Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, 174-75.

life with the rise of Kashmiri nationalism in the twentieth century. Nund Rishi became a central figure to what Chitrlekha Zutshi has called the “Kashmiri narrative public” that emerged in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> But the discourse on the Rishis intensified in the twentieth century with the rise of a political conflict around Kashmir. It is under these more recent circumstances that the J&K Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages prepared two editions of Nund Rishi’s mystical poetry edited by Amin Kamil and Moti Lal Saqi.<sup>21</sup> The new administration of the Kashmiri nationalist leader Sheikh Abdullah celebrated the six hundredth anniversary of Nund Rishi’s birth in 1978 soon after Abdullah’s release from prison, and his landmark victory in 1977 elections that followed an accord between the Kashmiri nationalists and the Indian leadership.<sup>22</sup> In 1998, the University of Kashmir in Srinagar established an independent research centre devoted to the study of Nund Rishi called the Centre for *Shaikh al-‘Ālam* Studies, or *Markaz-e Nūr* (Centre of Light), with its own dedicated journal in English and Kashmiri called *‘Alamdār*.

The centrality of Nund Rishi (and his older contemporary *Shaiva* saint, Lal Ded) to Kashmiri cultural memory has never been in question. If the Muslim nationalist poet, Muhammad Iqbal, has dominated the political idiom of Kashmiri nationalism in the twentieth century, it is the Rishi thought which has been central to cultural and historical

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<sup>20</sup> Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Kashmir’s Contested Pasts: Narratives, Sacred Geographies, and the Historical Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12.

<sup>21</sup> See Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu’* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966) and Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> The roots of the armed insurgency in Kashmir go back to the 1975 accord which lacked popular backing from the Kashmiris. Many of the leaders of Kashmir’s secessionist movement were members of the Plebiscite Front, which was dissolved by Sheikh Abdullah’s National Conference after the 1975 accord.

narratives of Kashmir's pasts.<sup>23</sup> But the politico-spiritual legacy of Nund Rishi is deeply contested in Kashmir in the present between such reformist and revivalist Islamic groups as the *Ahl-e Hadīth*, *Deobandīs* and the *Jamā'at-e Islami* and the new Sufi-leaning *Barelvī* groups such as *Kārvān-e Islām* and the traditional devotees of the *Suhrawardī*, *Kubrāwiyyā*, and Rishi shrines. If, for the *Ahl-e Hadith* or the neo-Salafis, Nund Rishi is one of the early reformers of Islam; the *Barelvīs* see the Rishis as early exemplars of a distinctively South Asian Sufi practice.<sup>24</sup>

Nund Rishi was born in 1378 in Kaimuh to a family of recent Hindu converts to Islam and died in 1440 at Chrar in Central Kashmir. Pandit Anand Koul writes that the name Nūr al-Dīn was conferred on him by Mīr Muḥammad Hamadānī, the son of Sayyīd 'Alī Hamadānī, who had settled many of the first immigrant Sufis in Kashmir.<sup>25</sup> Koul also writes that Nund Rishi's father was a disciple of Yasmān Rishi who had converted him to Islam.<sup>26</sup> But some other scholars have written that both of his parents were the disciples of Sayyīd Husayn Simnānī, a *Kubrāwiyyā* Sufi and a cousin of Mīr Sayyīd 'Alī Hamadānī, who lived near Nund Rishi's native Kaimuh in South Kashmir (Sayyīd Husayn Simnānī is also connected by popular legends to the *Shaiva* saint, Lal Ded).<sup>27</sup> According to popular hagiographical and biographical accounts, Nund Rishi retreated at

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<sup>23</sup> For more on Iqbal and Kashmir, see Jagannath Azad, *Iqbāl aur Kashmīr* (Srinagar: Ali Muhammad and Sons, 1977).

<sup>24</sup> These are not, however, straightforward contestations: the role of the Indian State mediates, and complicates, the relations between these old and new Islamic religious and political formations. We must also heed the warning of Hans Harder: "...it seems misleading to think of the orthodox/reformist and Sufi/shrine/popular clusters as separate and always clearly distinguishable modes of religiosity. They should be thought of rather as polarities in a field of phenomena that allow for manifold intersections and discursive overlaps. Hans Harder, *Sufism and Saint Veneration in Contemporary Bangladesh: The Maijbhandaris of Chittagong* (Routledge: New York, 2011), 318-19.

<sup>25</sup> Anand Koul, "A Life of Nand Rishi," *The Indian Antiquary* Vol. 58 (October 1929): 195.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis*, 70.

the age of 30 to a complete withdrawal from social life.<sup>28</sup> But in 1420, Nund Rishi returned from twelve years of solitary meditation to establish a new Sufi Order at a time of deepening crisis in Kashmir.<sup>29</sup> The remaining two decades of his life were spent in intense involvement in the spiritual and political life of Kashmiris. Nund Rishi's disciples including Baba Bām al-Dīn, Baba Zain al-Dīn, Baba Latīf al-Dīn and Baba Naṣar al-Dīn – many of them recent converts to Islam – helped popularize and spread the Rishi Order to remote corners of Kashmir. But the Rishi Order faced a crisis of legitimacy, as Nund Rishi could not trace his lineage back to either the family of the Prophet Muḥammad or any of the great Sufi Masters, a *sine qua non* for Sufi teaching. Nund Rishi resolved this crisis of legitimation by claiming an Uwaysī initiation i-e a direct spiritual initiation by Prophet Muhammad. But it is the relationship of Nund Rishi to the Shaivite saint, Lal Ded, who also wrote mystical verse in Kashmiri, which has endured in the Kashmiri tradition.<sup>30</sup> The spiritual relation between Nund Rishi and Lal Ded is best expressed in the Kashmiri legend about the infant Nund Rishi's refusal to suckle at his mother's breast. Lal Ded is supposed to have taken the infant Nund Rishi into her arms and said:

*Yinu' mandchokh nu' tu' channu' chukh mandchān* (You were not ashamed of being born

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<sup>28</sup> Jaishree Kak Odin, *Lallā to Nūruddīn: Rishī-Sufī poetry of Kashmir* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013), 17-18.

<sup>29</sup> The traditional period of a *mahātapa* (period of great asceticism) for a Hindu ascetic is twelve years and it is curious that the hagiographical tradition ascribes twelve years of meditation to Nund Rishi. Hugh van Skyhawk, *Well Articulated Better Paths* (Islamabad: Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 2014), 7.

<sup>30</sup> David Lorenzen, in an Introduction to his *Religious Movements in South Asia 600-1800*, argues that we are yet to pose an important question about the Rishi movement: "What possible relation existed between the iconoclastic social and religious ideas of Lal Ded and Shaikh Nuruddin Rishi and those of later nirguni poet saints, particularly Kabir? To what extent were Muslim Sufis able to use Hindu texts and ideas for their own purposes?" See David Lorenzen, "Introduction," in *Religious Movements in South Asia 600-1800*, ed. David Lorenzen (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

but you are ashamed of being breast-fed).<sup>31</sup> The beginnings of a new Kashmiri literary and religious culture in Kashmir at its moment of origin turns out to be a transmission of the spiritual vitality of a Shaivite tradition into an Islamic mystical idiom.<sup>32</sup> Many hagiographical accounts also mention that Nund Rishi's mother was known to Lal Ded. Koul writes that Lal Ded said to Nund Rishi's mother, *Sādrū' Moj*, whose first name meant "ocean" in Kashmiri: *Sōdras hē chhu mokhtu' nyērān* (Pearls come only out of the ocean).<sup>33</sup>

Even as many studies have appeared on Lal Ded, there have been few serious attempts to address the thinking of Nund Rishi.<sup>34</sup> The studies in English, Urdu or Kashmiri published on Nund Rishi in the last few decades either offer us Nund Rishi's poetry with approximate translations and religious exposition or attempt to situate Nund Rishi in relation to the religious and political history of Kashmir.<sup>35</sup> Some isolated efforts do take on a more interpretive task but the thinking of this saint-poet remains largely

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<sup>31</sup> Anand Koul, "A Life of Nand Rishi," *The Indian Antiquary* 58 (October 1929): 196. I have altered the transliteration for consistency. Jaishree Kak Odin writes: "This legend has been interpreted as Lallā acknowledging Nūruddīn as her spiritual heir." See Jaishree Kak Odin, *Lallā to Nūruddīn: Rishī-Sufī poetry of Kashmir* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013), 18.

<sup>32</sup> In an essay on the Rishi movement, Charles Ramsey writes: "The underlying narrative of the Kashmiri transition to Islam is that Lal Ded was Nooruddīn's first nurse, or surrogate mother." See Charles M. Ramsey, "Rishīwāer: Kashmir, the Garden of Saints," in *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*, eds. Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey (New York: Continuum, 2012), 198.

<sup>33</sup> Anand Koul, "A Life of Nand Rishi," 196. I have altered the transliteration for consistency.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, J L Kaul, *Lal Ded* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1973) and Richard Carnac Temple, *The Religion and Teachings of Lalla* (New Delhi: Vintage, 1990). The study by Temple was originally published in 1924 by the Cambridge University Press. Lal Ded has also been widely translated among others by Ranjit Hoskote, A. K. Ramanujan and Coleman Barks.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Asadullah Afaqi, *Ta'limāt-e Shaikh al-Ālam Volume 1 and 2* (Tsrār: self-published, 1998) and G N Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2009). See also Gauhar's earlier study published by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters: G N Gauhar, *Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali (Nund Rishi)* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988).

unexplored.<sup>36</sup> In the earliest English-language study of Nund Rishi by a Kashmiri, Pandit Anand Koul, writing as early as 1929 in the *Indian Antiquary*, bemoans that the older works of literature in the Kashmiri language have been neglected.<sup>37</sup> Koul calls Nund Rishi “a hermit of the highest order” and adds that “despite six centuries having rolled by since he lived, his name is held in profound respect and veneration by both Muhammadans and Hindus throughout Kashmir.”<sup>38</sup> Walter Lawrence christens Nund Rishi the “national saint” of Kashmir.<sup>39</sup> Koul speaks of the poetry of the great sages and oracles which shaped the history of thought in Kashmir, in particular, the aphoristic style of Nund Rishi: “The Kashmiri repeats such aphoristic lines again and again in his everyday life as current coins of quotation.”<sup>40</sup> Koul also points out the difficulties involved in reading Nund Rishi and Lal Ded from the available manuscripts:

What they had to say they taught orally to their disciples, and their sayings were written after their date in the Persian character, without punctuation or diacritical marks. Thus defectively recorded, they have become inextricably confused and full of interpolations by disciples, imitators and rhapsodists. Whatever was noted by any one person in the margin of his treasured private copy by way of interpretation, was regarded by the next owner or copyist as part of the text: there was no means of distinguishing *addenda* from mere *marginalia*, for they knew not that it was impossible to alter a word in such sayings without altering it for the worse.<sup>41</sup>

In this dissertation, I avoid some of the notorious difficulties of studying the original manuscripts that preserved Nund Rishi’s mystical verse by turning to two excellent critical editions of the collected works of Nund Rishi and another collection by the Chrar-based independent researcher, Asadullah Afaqi. The first two (*Nūrnāmu’* by Amin Kamil

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<sup>36</sup> I have here in mind, in particular, studies of Nund Rishi’s poetry by Rahman Rahi, Shafi Shauq and Hamidi Kashmiri.

<sup>37</sup> Anand Koul, “A Life of Nand Rishi,” 194.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> See Walter Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir* (London: Henry Frowde, 1895), 295.

<sup>40</sup> Anand Koul, “A Life of Nand Rishi,” 195.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

and *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* by Moti Lal Saqi) were commissioned by the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages in 1966 and 1985.<sup>42</sup> I have also consulted the more expanded collection of Asadullah Afaqi.<sup>43</sup> These collections gather the mystical verse of Nund Rishi, which essentially consists of *shruks*: a form of Kashmiri poetry exemplified by the saint-poet. The word *shruk* appears to be derived from the Sanskrit *shloka*. In contemporary Kashmiri, *shruk* literally, means a ‘knot’, and an alternative reading takes this to be the meaning of *shruk*. The *shruk* is often read from what it leaves unsaid. The *shruk* bears family resemblance to riddle-like genres, even though *shruks* are different from riddles (it is the existential mood of the riddle which one sometimes finds in the *shruk*). The resemblance is more striking in those *shruks* that reveal “an excluded cosmos, a non-world or topsy-turvy world lurking just beneath or within our properly ordered and familiar one.”<sup>44</sup> The *shruk*, however, is closer to such modes of expression as prophecy and the proverb (many lines from Nund Rishi’s *shruks* have passed into the Kashmiri language as proverbs).

The *shruk*, like the *vākh*, emerged at a time of transition from Apabrhamsha-Prakrit forms to Kashmiri.<sup>45</sup> The *shruks* also emerged at a time when two cosmopolitan languages were competing for ascendancy at the Kashmiri Court: Sanskrit was still the language of the Court, but was to be soon replaced by Persian. The *shruks* are the site

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<sup>42</sup> See Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985) and Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu*’ (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966). The controversial decision of the Academy to supersede Kamil’s collection has been debated by Kamil in his book of essays, *Javāban chu ‘arz*. See Amin Kamil, *Javāban chu ‘arz* (Srinagar: self-published, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> See, in particular, Asadullah Afaqi, *Ā’īnā-e Ḥaq: Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Life Foundation, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Galit Hasan-Rokem and David Shulman, “Introduction,” in Galit Hasan-Rokem and David Shulman, *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>45</sup> The first time these texts were recorded was in a script that was borrowed from Persian and Arabic.

where we detect a gradual shift in the Kashmiri vernacular from its connection to linguistic resources of the Sanskrit to that of Persian and Arabic (this dynamic is not visible in the *vākh*). The Kashmiri Sanskritist, T. N. Ganjoo has argued that both Lal Ded's *vākhs* and Nund Rishi's *shruks* owe their origin to the *pada* form of poetry. According to Ganju, *pada*, *vākh*, and *shruk* are three separate moments in the history of a particular genre.<sup>46</sup> Ganjoo traces the history of the *pada* form of poetry to as early as the eighth and ninth centuries, and writes that the Kashmiri philosopher, Abhinavagupta, mentions *chumma pada* in his classic *Tantrāloka*, a classic on *tantrā* by the great tenth century Kashmir Shaivite philosopher. But the Kashmiri poet and literary critic, Rahman Rahi, contends that if there is no difference between these genres, how did the different names for *vākh* and *shruk* come about? Rahi also asks the intriguing question why, even though *vākhs* are used by other Kashmiri poets, such as Rupa Bhawani in the seventeenth century, *shruks* are only associated with the name of Nund Rishi.<sup>47</sup> The Sanskrit dictionaries give similar meanings for *vākh* and *shruk* but also register differences. The *shruks* have a synoptic, gnomic quality to them like proverbs, but *vākhs* develop a single thought to its extreme possibilities. But, for Rahi, perhaps the most significant difference is that *vākh* is a call of the gods.<sup>48</sup> The *shruks*, on the other hand, deal with the finitude of human existence. Rahi, however, stretches this interpretation to its limits when he suggests that the contemporary progressive poetry can be seen in continuity with the *shruks* and the modernist/existential poetry in continuity with the *vākhs* (this is a none-

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<sup>46</sup> T. N. Ganjoo, "Lallu' vākh lisāni zāvijār," in *Shīrazu'*, Lal Ded Number, 16: 6 (2002), 130-131.

<sup>47</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Vākh tu' Shrukī: Akh hayātī muṭāllu' tu' sām," in "Mashriqī shā'irī jamāliyyāt," special issue, *Anhār*, (1997), 124-34.

<sup>48</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Vākh tu' Shrukī: Akh hayātī muṭāllu' tu' sām," 124-34.

too-subtle way of declaring allegiance to Lal Ded as well as declaring the superiority of modernist/existential poetry). Even though Rupa Bhawani wrote *vākhs* in the seventeenth century, and Bimla Raina has revived the genre in our times, the *shruk* itself has been ascribed to none other than Nund Rishi.<sup>49</sup> To imitate the poetic form used by the greatest Sufi exemplar of Kashmir was to risk being compared to Nund Rishi. This was increasingly untenable in an atmosphere of excessive devotional piety. Yet the singularity of the *shruk* also made possible the multiple countersignatures which have come down to us as the corpus of Nund Rishi *shruks*.

The aphoristic lends itself to countersignatures.<sup>50</sup> One can also see the tension between *vākḥ* and *shruk* as the measure of a distance between Kashmir's Hindu-Buddhist milieu and its new Islamic articulations: the *vākḥ* came to be associated in Kashmiri literary history with the Hindu-Buddhist religious idiom, and the *shruk* with Sufi poetry. The *shruks* are typified by compressions and omissions and the relations of the *shruk* to such early Indo-Aryan forms such as *dohā* and *chaupāī* needs further investigation.<sup>51</sup> In many of Nund Rishi's longer poems made up of clusters of *shruks*, for instance, the last

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<sup>49</sup> See S. L. Sadhu, *Rupa Bhawani* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2003) and A N Dhar, *Country of the soul: An English translation of Bimla Raina's Kashmiri verses* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> One of the meanings of *vākḥ*, in Sanskrit, is 'aphoristic saying.' See Shafi Shauq, *Lalla Dyad: The Mystic Kashmiri Poetess* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books: 2015), 35.

<sup>51</sup> Imre Bangha, in a study of vernacularization in an early Hindi epic by the fifteenth-century poet Vishnudas of Gwalior, writes that many of *bhaktī* poet Kabir's poems are *chaupāī* compositions reworked as *padas* with their first line presented as the refrain. See Imre Bangha, "Early Hindi Epic Poetry in Gwalior: Beginnings and Continuities in the Rāmāyan of Vishnudas" in Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh, *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 392. In the same essay, Imre Bangha speaks of the friendly relations between the Gwalior ruler Dungar Singh and Sultan Zayn al-'Ābidīn of Kashmir, the *Shāhmīrī* ruler of Kashmir during the last two decades of Nund Rishi's life.

line is presented as the refrain signalling their use in an oral performance tradition continuous with similar genres in medieval North India.<sup>52</sup>

The powerful currents in Nund Rishi's poetry belong as much to Tantric, Yoga and Nātha spiritual movements, Kashmir Shaivism and Mahayana Buddhism, as they do to early Islamic asceticism, medieval dervish traditions and Sufi theology.<sup>53</sup> The middle path between asceticism and worldliness Nund Rishi advocates in many of his *shruks* can be seen in relation to both Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī's synthesis between the sober and ecstatic tendencies in medieval Sufism but it also resonates as powerfully with the attitudes of North Indian siddhas. This tension can also be found internally in both Lal Ded and Nund Rishi. Following Ranjit Hoskote's approach to Lal Ded, I am inclined to approach the body of *shruks* as the 'Nund Rishi corpus' with multiple authors, rather than as the work of a single individual.<sup>54</sup> This intensifies, rather than lessens, our interest in the figure of Nund Rishi as a poet. The *shruks* of Nund Rishi passed through what Ranjit Hoskote, discussing Lal Ded, calls "the informal editorial attention" of "reciters, scribes and votaries" from the fifteenth century to the present.<sup>55</sup> But I have taken care to privilege only those *shruks* which are either more widely cited in twentieth-century scholarship on Nund Rishi or are popular in everyday Kashmiri. Hoskote further cites Karin Schomer's excellent essay on *dōhā* to claim that *vākh* belongs to the family of forms which are

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<sup>52</sup> There are still professional singers who sing the *shruks*. One such singer was filmed by me in my 2002 documentary film, *Paradise on a River of Hell* (co-directed with Meenu Gaur). See *Paradise on a river of Hell*, directed by Meenu Gaur and Abir Bazaz (2002: New Delhi, India: PSBT, 2002), DVD.

<sup>53</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi notes a strong parallel between the Rishi movement and Nātha yogis: "All they (Rishīs) seem to have added to the Nātha framework was the name of Allah or *huwa*." Cited in Charles M. Ramsey, "Rishīwaer: Kashmir, the Garden of Saints," in *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*, eds. Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey (New York: Continuum, 2012), 199.

<sup>54</sup> Even a cursory examination of the collections of Nund Rishi's mystical verse suggests that the situation is no different for him.

<sup>55</sup> Ranjit Hoskote, *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Dēd* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), xii.

“grouped under the generic title of the *dōhā*.”<sup>56</sup> *Shruk* too belongs to the same family of forms and reveals two of the major functions of the *dōhā*: compressed aphoristic statement and lyrical intensity.<sup>57</sup> Even though the *vākh* and *shruk* differ in their thematic but their effects on the listeners aren’t also dissimilar: these poems, writes Hoskote about the *vākh*, “strike us like brief and blinding bursts of light: epiphanic, provocative, they shuttle between the vulnerability of doubt and the assurance of an insight gained through resilience and reflection.”<sup>58</sup>

The contestations over the meanings of Islam at the peripheries have been a major force shaping the contemporary Muslim world and inform some of the most central debates within the Islamic tradition. The Rishis were new Muslim converts to Islam, and it is their intervention in the thinking of religion and politics at the margins of the worlds of medieval Islam which has attracted the attention of historians. The contemporary histories of South Asian Islam, as pointed out by Bruce Lawrence in an early essay, have neglected regional Sufi Orders such as those which emerged around Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī and Nund Rishi in Kashmir.<sup>59</sup> The mystical poetry of Nund Rishi acquires even more significance because, as the historian Chitrlekha Zutshi reminds us, he “contributed to the production of a regional culture on the site of the development of the new religious culture” after the advent of Islam in Kashmir in the early fourteenth century.<sup>60</sup> The Kashmiri tradition remembers Nund Rishi’s mystical poetry as the *Koshur*

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, l.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, liii.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>59</sup> Bruce Lawrence, “Islam in India: The Function of Institutional Sufism in the Islamization of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Kashmir,” *Contributions to Asian Studies* Vol. 17: 42.

<sup>60</sup> Chitrlekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional identity and the Making of Kashmir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 26. Elsewhere Chitrlekha Zutshi has pointed out that Islamic

*Qu'rān*, or the Kashmiri Qur'ān, just as the Persians remember the poetry of Jalal al-Dīn Rūmī as the Persian Qur'ān. Ronit Ricci, in an influential study on the spread of Islam in South East Asia, has highlighted the role played by “literary networks” that shaped regional and trans-regional Islamic histories.<sup>61</sup> This was a context in which “orally transmitted materials as well as performative traditions complemented and enriched written literatures” and a large number of people, which some call illiterate by contemporary standards, could recite texts for a whole number of occasions.<sup>62</sup> The *shruk* was thus widely disseminated among such audiences rather than ‘readers.’ These texts had a powerful function in pre-modern Muslim society in South Asia. As Ricci puts it: “Texts written in metrical verse and meant to be recited, often in public, were central to conveying and shaping cultural codes, religious doctrines, and political agendas.”<sup>63</sup>

The Rishi Order is the only regional Sufi Order to have emerged in Kashmir, and it is with the Rishis that a local articulation of Kashmir gets instituted (unlike the imperial articulations of early medieval Kashmiri rulers). Most of the Rishis were Kashmiri, and Nund Rishi himself used the Kashmiri language to reach out to the Kashmiri peasantry as centres of Rishi thought and practice were gradually established all over Kashmir.<sup>64</sup>

Even though the *Kubrāwīyyā* Order flourished in Kashmir, and was strongly associated in

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universalism in Kashmir “combined seamlessly with Sanskrit cosmopolitanism and Kashmiri localism to produce a clearly defined sense of Kashmir as a place.” See Chitralekha Zutshi, *Kashmir's Contested Pasts: Narratives, Sacred Geographies, and the Historical Imagination*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Sheldon Pollock, in an essay in 1995 for a special issue of the Indian journal *Social Scientist* on “Literary History, Region and Nation in South Asia”, connects the rise of vernacular literatures in medieval India to new social movements: “It is particular social groups seeking a voice that create new languages, texts, and definitions of the “literary,” and social groups that, in writing the histories of how all this happens, are writing the histories of themselves.” See Sheldon Pollock, “Literary History, Region, and Nation in South Asia,” *Social Scientist* Vol. 23, no. 269-71 (Oct-Dec 1995): 1.

South Asia with Kashmir, it was a Persian Sufi Order.<sup>65</sup> Thus the *Kubrāwīyyā*, despite being fueled by a pan-Islamic concern with the *Sharī‘ah*, became intimately connected with the regional sentiment in Kashmir.<sup>66</sup> Both Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī and Nund Rishi were seen as Sufi exemplars, and the Kashmiri tradition gradually smoothed out any historical memory of differences between the two Orders (on the question of conversions and the *Sharī‘ah*). Bruce Lawrence raises a question as valid for Nund Rishi as it is for Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī: “Is it not possible , however, that the too focused regional loyalties of his followers might restrict a saint whose contemporary reputation, *silsilā* affiliation and tomb-cult qualified him for pan-Indian fame?”<sup>67</sup> According to Bruce Lawrence, this is one of the reasons that the *Kubrāwīyyā* became a regional Kashmiri phenomenon in South Asia, and the Rishis emerged as a powerful local Order, is because Kashmiris “yield to non-indigenous cultural forms slowly, grudgingly, in most cases by transforming them into something identified as “Kashmiri.”<sup>68</sup>

Even if one disagrees with this assessment, regional sentiment has always played a role in Kashmir’s history. Kashmir could never be assimilated to the Delhi Sultanate and it entered the Mughal Empire only after a long and tenacious struggle that ended as late as 1586. As Bruce Lawrence puts it: “The proprietary zest of Kashmiri devotionism

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<sup>65</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan writes: “That Nur al-Din wielded greater influence than the Sufis from Persia and Central Asia is shown by the fact that Rishi folk literature remained in many ways the most significant medium of instruction in the values of Kashmiri society; it has had a deeper impact than mosques, *madrasas* and *maktabs*, where formal teaching was carried on.” See Muhammad Ishaq Khan, “The Impact of Islam in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586),” in Richard Eaton, ed., *India’s Islamic traditions 711-1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 354.

<sup>66</sup> The *khānqāh* of Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadani played a pivotal role in the anti-Dogra movement in Kashmir in the 1930s and the 1940s.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce Lawrence, “Islam in India: The Function of Institutional Sufism in the Islamization of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Kashmir,” 40.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

is further confirmed in the Rishi order.”<sup>69</sup> I would like to add that not only does the Rishi Order confirm the proprietary zest of Kashmiri devotionalism, it exemplifies that devotionalism in its eclectic mix of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic themes. Vegetarianism on the death anniversaries (*vorus*, or ‘*urs*’) of Rishi saints, rituals such as distributing rice cooked with turmeric (*taḥar*), offerings made at shrines (*niyāz*), and loud recitations of supplications after prayers (*awrād* and *manājāt* recitations), bear witness to the continuing influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on the social life of Islam in Kashmir.<sup>70</sup> These developments in the field of religious culture first emerged at the same time as the intensification of a strong regional, even proto-nationalist, sentiment in Kashmir.<sup>71</sup> The Rishi movement was a popular religious one because, as David Lorenzen suggests, like many pre-modern South Asian religious movements, most of its followers (if not the leaders) came “from middle- and lower-class [sic] groups and not from elite sections of the population.”<sup>72</sup> One of the central characteristics of the Rishi thought and practice was, according to the historian Muhammad Ishaq Khan, their belief in the “dignity and

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>70</sup> The vegetarianism of the Rishis appeared as a problem to other Sufi Orders who considered vegetarianism against the *Sunnah* (the established Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad).

<sup>71</sup> Shahzad Bashir has characterized this situation in medieval Kashmir as that of a “relatively open religious marketplace....” Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhsiyā between medieval and modern Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 201.

<sup>72</sup> It is also useful to bear in mind what David Lorenzen says about the social origins of religious movements such as the Rishi movement: “Among Hindus and Sikhs, as well as most South Asian Muslims, caste is in most contexts a more useful measure of social status than economic class, although caste and class boundaries do of course roughly coincide. In a South Asian context, then, a ‘popular’ religious movement is one whose followers mostly come from middle and low castes. The leaders of the movements, on the other hand, may come from either lower or higher castes. The religious movements in which the leaders come from non-Brahmin castes tend to embody social ideologies opposed to the religious and worldly dominance of upper castes, while movements with leaders from Brahmin castes tend to accept or reinforce such dominance.” David Lorenzen, “Introduction,” in *Religious movements in South Asia 600-1800*, ed. David Lorenzen (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

fundamental equality of man”<sup>73</sup> Khan writes that Nund Rishi’s role was “undoubtedly marked off from most Sufis by his social concerns, over and above his spiritual preoccupations.”<sup>74</sup> For Khan, it is the questions of caste and class that most trouble Nund Rishi.<sup>75</sup> According to Khan, Nund Rishi regarded hunger as “the most degrading of adversities.”<sup>76</sup> For instance, Baba Ali Raina, a later *Suharwardī* Sufi, on a visit to the Charar shrine, dreams of Nund Rishi who draws his attention to the poverty of the caretakers of the tomb-complex.<sup>77</sup> The Kashmiri peasantry, in particular, remained central to Nund Rishi’s political concerns. For Khan, what was unique about Nund Rishi was that he could engage the Kashmiris on “matters ranging from ontology to immediate social concerns.”<sup>78</sup> Even more significantly, the Rishi Order remained open to women. Among Nund Rishi’s female disciples were Behat Bībī, Dehat Bībī, Shām Dīyed and Shangu’ Bībī.<sup>79</sup> Nund Rishi, much like Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāgorī of the Chishti Order, embraced poverty and regional commitment. It may not be an exaggeration to say then that the function of the Rishis in Kashmir was similar to those of the Chishtis in North India and the Deccan.

The Rishis were more popular in rural Kashmir than in the towns or the cities. There are shrines associated with all the major Sufi Orders in Kashmir but the Rishi centers in rural Kashmir far outweigh the number of shrines belonging to other Sufi

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<sup>73</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis*, 73.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

Orders, signaling a wider popularity of the Rishis in the countryside.<sup>80</sup> There are few Rishi shrines in the capital city of Srinagar, which is otherwise dominated by the shrines of the *Naqshbandī*, *Suhrawardī*, and *Kubrāwiyyā* Sufis. Bruce Lawrence speaks of a double profile – high and low – for Sufi cults in the subcontinent.<sup>81</sup> Such a classification has the same limits as that of the conceptual opposition between the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition, deployed for instance in the study of Islam in the region by the historian Aziz Ahmad, but it is nonetheless helpful as a heuristic tool in situating the tension between the *Kubrāwiyyā* and the Rishi Order. The *Kubrāwiyyā* and the Rishi Orders are expressions of this high and low profile for Sufi cults. The biceedal participation in the Rishi cult, which has persisted to the present, could also have played a role in the rapid development of Rishi shrines in rural Kashmir because the population of Kashmir in late fourteenth century was still largely Hindu. For the Hindus and Buddhists of Kashmir, the Rishis were hardly distinguishable from the siddhas and yogis who had traversed the Kashmiri landscape for centuries. According to Muhammad Ishaq Khan, the Rishis did not marry, abstained from eating meat and subsisted on wild vegetables (*vopalhākh*, in particular) which were freely available in the forest.<sup>82</sup> Some of the Rishis even dressed like yogis.<sup>83</sup> According to G N Gauhar, Nund Rishi composed a poem about the Buddha at the end of his twelve years of meditation called *Buddha Carita* (now

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<sup>80</sup> Elsewhere Muhammad Ishaq Khan writes that Nund Rishi “seems to have visited almost every part of the Valley... There are a number of villages in Kashmir that still preserve the tradition of his visit or sojourn in one form or the other.” See Muhammad Ishaq Khan, “The Impact of Islam in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586),” 352.

<sup>81</sup> Bruce Lawrence, “Islam in India: The Function of Institutional Sufism in the Islamization of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Kashmir,” 36.

<sup>82</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, “The Impact of Islam in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586),” 353.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

believed to be lost).<sup>84</sup> But this is more likely an allusion to a possible manuscript of Aśvagoṣha's *Buddhācharita*, which was likely in the possession of Nund Rishi.

It remains unclear to what degree the Rishi *silsilā* (Order) was a Sufi *silsilā*? Sufism arrived in Kashmir when it had already passed from its classical to an institutional phase (and reached the historical development in which *khānqahs* and *ṭarīqās* were established): it was no longer confined to ascetic protest groups but involved hierarchical organization, charismatic leaders (*pīrs*, *shaykhs* or *murshids*) and territories of spiritual jurisdiction (*vilāyats*). In other words, Sufism itself had been looking for fresh ground, especially those strands of it which were in competition with the other Orders. The geographical spread of the network of Rishi *mazārs* (tombs), and the hagiographical accounts of its charismatic leaders both suggest that Rishis functioned like other medieval Sufi Orders, but also shared much in common with *dervish* groups. The Rishi Order emerged in the new historical situation in Kashmir not as a quietist mystical Order but as a popular religio-political movement that intervened in debates about the meanings of Islam at a time when Sufi rivalries in Kashmir had acquired an unusual intensity over the relation of the new Muslim Sultanate to the question of the *Sharī'ah* (or Islamic Law), and, in particular, over the question of Islam's relation to Hinduism. The Rishi Order was also established at a time when Kashmir, even though ruled by a Muslim dynasty, was predominantly Hindu with a significant Buddhist population. Aziz Ahmad writes, in a seminal essay on conversions in Kashmir, that at that early stage, "Islam in Kashmir was as tolerant and eclectic as the Hinduism of Kashmir," where it had been brought by

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<sup>84</sup> G. N. Gauhar, *Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 61-62.

soldiers and merchants from as early as the ninth century.<sup>85</sup> One important factor to bear in mind is that Islam entered Kashmir not from the South but from such Eastern lands of medieval Islam as Khorasan. Even before the rise of the Rishis, “the basic Islamic model was the travelling or immigrant Ṣūfī of the “little tradition,” the Qalandar and the dervish.”<sup>86</sup> The conversions to Islam in Kashmir were gradual and started at the end of a long and turbulent period of internal instability and the Mongol invasions.<sup>87</sup> As Aziz Ahmad hints, caste appears to have played a significant role in conversions and the consolidation of Muslim power in early medieval Kashmir.<sup>88</sup> The eight-month long occupation of Kashmir by the Mongol commander Zulchu in 1321 had ravaged the valley, and many Kashmiris were captured to be sold in the slave markets.<sup>89</sup> Zulchu’s was the third and the most severe of the Mongol invasions of Kashmir.<sup>90</sup> Even as Zulchu perished on his return from Kashmir, there was a deep crisis of legitimacy amongst Kashmiris, who had organized themselves into communal self-help groups. The Muslim war-bands in Kashmir were now in a position of power and a combination of circumstances pushed a fugitive prince from Ladakh, Rinchen, to the throne of Kashmir.<sup>91</sup> The rule of Rinchen, who converted to Islam and ruled as Sultan Ṣadr al-Dīn,

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<sup>85</sup> Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” *Central Asiatic Journal* Vol. 23 No. 1/2 (1979): 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> The transition in power did slowly promote conversions at the Court. Such low castes as *dombas*, for instance, could only convert by joining the army of the new Muslim State. Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” 11.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>89</sup> Simon Digby, “Between Ancient and Modern Kashmir: The Rule and Role of Sultans and Sufis (1200/1300-1600)” in *The Arts of Kashmir*, ed. Pratapaditya Pal (New York: Asia Society, 2007), 116.

<sup>90</sup> Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” 4.

<sup>91</sup> It is possible that Rinchen’s precarious situation as a Tibetan refugee in Kashmir had led to his conversion. The Kashmiri tradition attributes this to the saintly powers of the *Suhrawardī* saint, Bulbul Shah. The history of Islam in Kashmir was entangled from the beginning with the political intervention of

lasted only three years, and Hindu rule was soon restored in Kashmir. But the Muslim nobles like Shāh Mīr had already consolidated their power. The resistance of Shāh Mīr to a late Mongol threat made him even more popular, as the Hindu King Udayanadeva had fled to Ladakh during the invasion. Shāh Mīr had also defended Kashmir against Muslim invaders, like Achala and Urdil, and was acceptable to the Hindu political and military elite as a ruler.<sup>92</sup> It was only after years of uncertainty and a palace intrigue that Shāh Mīr finally ascended to the throne in 1339 AD under the title of Sultan Shams al-Dīn and founded the *Shāhmīrī* dynasty. Many groups of immigrants from Central Asia began now to arrive in Kashmir, who saw it as a land of opportunity just beyond the reach of Ilkhanid Mongols. It was at this time that the *Kubrāwiyyā* – a highly trained and professional class of immigrant Sufis from Iran – started missionary work in Kashmir and insisted on the strict implementation of the *Sharī‘ah*. It was not until the reign of Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413) that Islam began to impact State policy.<sup>93</sup> But even the iconoclastic Sultan Sikandar had Hindu wives, and the atmosphere at the Court still was, as Aziz Ahmad calls it, one of “highly symbiotic syncretism.”<sup>94</sup> Yet Sultan Sikandar persecuted his Hindu subjects, which led to their migration South to the plains. There was rapid social transformation in Kashmir, which has only been interpreted along sectarian lines. The Sanskrit chronicler Jonaraja characterises these changes in the following way: “As the wind destroyed the trees, and locusts the shali crop, so did the Yavanas destroy

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Persian Sufis. On the Sufi Bulbul Shah, see Yoginder Sikand, “Hazrat Bulbul Shah: The First Known Muslim Missionary in Kashmir,” *The Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20:2, 361-367.

<sup>92</sup> Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” 9.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

the usages of Kashmira.”<sup>95</sup> Even as Muhammad Ishaq Khan dismisses the anxieties of Jonaraja and Srivara, two Sanskrit chroniclers of the early Sultanate period, as merely a concern for the preservation of Brahmin hegemony, it is more likely that the tensions between the Hindu and the Muslim communities had escalated by the end of the fourteenth century. It is against this background that Nund Rishi started the Rishi movement, which approached Islam from the standpoint of local, and non-elite, concerns of its new Kashmiri converts and its non-Muslim majority.<sup>96</sup> Even though Khan argues that Nund Rishi and Lal Ded helped connect the Little (peasant) tradition of Kashmir to the Great (Islamic) tradition, he concedes that Lal Ded and Nund Rishi’s “verses of ‘dissent’ and ‘protest’ gradually created a sense of awareness in the common man against social and political discrimination.”<sup>97</sup>

It doesn’t occur to Khan that this political rebellion may have nothing to do with any desire in peasant society (which he calls, following Robert Redfield, a half-society) to connect with what he calls “the Great tradition of the reflective few...”.<sup>98</sup> The entry of the *Kubrāwiyyā* Sufis in Kashmir as immigrants, including for missionary work, had a clear consequence: an assertion of the superiority of Muslim rule and an assumption of

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<sup>95</sup> *Shali* is the paddy crop. Muhammad Ishaq Khan, “The Impact of Islam in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586),” 345.

<sup>96</sup> Even though scholars remain divided along sectarian lines about the conversion to Islam in Kashmir (some attribute it to the missionary work of the Sufis and others to the persecution of the Muslim Sultans), the contemporary sources are silent on the processes of religious conversion. See Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, 253. Richard Eaton has suggested that the Islamization at the periphery of Indo-Muslim States was a dual process of accretion and reform, and the religious change was often connected to ecological change. See Richard Eaton, “Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India” in Richard C Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 122-23.

<sup>97</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, “The Impact of Islam in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586),” 348.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

the inferiority of the non-Muslim population.<sup>99</sup> Yet the purpose of the mission of Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī “was not the ‘conversion’ of non-Muslims, but rather the ‘Islamization’ of the ruling dynasty and the nominally Muslim element of the ruling elite.”<sup>100</sup> Hamadānī began by reforming the small Muslim minority in Srinagar and insisted that the ruler adopt Muslim dress and customs as well as distance himself from the prevailing Hindu-Buddhist culture in greater Kashmir.<sup>101</sup> Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī also championed “a pietistic political concept of monarchy” best expressed in his treatise *Dhakhīrat al mulūk*.<sup>102</sup> The move to ‘Islamization’ and *Sharī‘ah*-based rule by the *Kubrāwīyyā* gained momentum later under Sultan Sikandar who ruled from 1389 to 1413. The *Kubrāwīyyā* mantle was taken up later in the fifteenth century by the Nūrbakshīs who also played a role in the gradual Islamization of Kashmir.<sup>103</sup> Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī was more concerned about the state of the *Sharī‘ah* in Kashmir than gaining converts. As Muhammad Ishaq Khan writes: “It would appear that the subsequent missionary activities of Saiyyid ‘Ali, his son, and their followers in the Valley need to be studied not only in the context of their missionary zeal to spread the true message of Islam but also in the context of their deep concern for the enforcement of the Islamic law in a land where the norms of the sharī‘a were violated by the new converts; thus, their aim was not only

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<sup>99</sup> Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” 11. According to one of the biographers of Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī, Prophet Muḥammad had commanded the saint in a dream to visit Kashmir to convert the people of Kashmir to Islam. See Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, lxxi.

<sup>100</sup> Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” 12.

<sup>101</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis*, 65.

<sup>102</sup> Aziz Ahmad, “Conversions to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” 12. See also Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 43-46.

<sup>103</sup> Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhsiyā between medieval and modern Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 201.

to reconvert, but to consolidate the foothold already gained.”<sup>104</sup> According to Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, the fact that Sayyid Ali left Kashmir when Sultan Qutbuddin did not implement the *Sharī‘ah* is corroborated by four different sources.<sup>105</sup> Rafiqi argues that the conflict between Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī and Sultan Qutb al-Dīn emerged “in their different attitudes regarding the implementation of the *Shari‘a* which made it impossible for the Sayyīd to be reconciled with the policies of Sultan Qutbud’Dīn.”<sup>106</sup> Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī may have left Kashmir after disagreements with the Sultan over the question of *Shari‘ah* but he always commanded the respect of the *Shāhmīrī* Sultans.<sup>107</sup> The *Shāhmīrī* rulers of Kashmir wore the cap of Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī, which he had given to Sultan Qutb al-Dīn before he left Kashmir, until the death of Sultan Fateh Shah in 1493.<sup>108</sup> Later Muhammad Hamadānī, the son of Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī, became the leader of the *Kubrāwīyyā* community in Kashmir and converted Suha Bhatta, the Sultan’s Chief Minister and Commander-in Chief, to Islam. Suha Bhatta (now Saif al-Dīn) pursued a policy of persecution towards Kashmir’s Hindu population. It was Suha Bhatta (Saif al-Dīn) who placed restrictions on Nund Rishi.<sup>109</sup> The tensions between the *Kubrāwīyyā* and the Rishis did not, however, escalate in the subsequent rule of Sultan Zayn al-‘Ābidīn.

Muhammad Ishaq Khan emphasizes that Nund Rishi made no conscious effort to convert people to Islam, even though some prominent non-Muslims did convert to join

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<sup>104</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, “The Impact of Islam in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586),” 343.

<sup>105</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, fn78, li.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>107</sup> Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī had urged the ruler to adhere to the *Sharī‘ah* and annulled a marriage between the Sultan and his sister-in-law (deemed illegal under Islamic Law). Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis*, 65.

<sup>108</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis*, 68.

<sup>109</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, lxxv.

the Rishi Order.<sup>110</sup> Rafiqi concurs when he writes that the Rishis “did not concern themselves with missionary activities or the establishment of *madrasas*, and kept themselves aloof from the ruling classes.”<sup>111</sup> But elsewhere Khan reads in the asceticism of the Rishis, a “mode and method of conversion”<sup>112</sup> Khan’s anxiety about the Rishis is best expressed in his own words: “...the beliefs of the Rishis were not incompatible with Islam” which is what he sets out to establish in his detailed study of Nund Rishi.<sup>113</sup>

But such an assessment only reinforces the proximity between the Rishis and Kashmir’s Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions. The popularity of the Rishis also hints at a later reinstatement of the fluid exchange between Hindu and Muslim traditions at the beginning of Sultan Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s rule (revered in Kashmir as the *Bud Shāh*, or the Great King) in 1420. But not even half a century rule of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (who allowed converts to return to their old faith) could reverse the impact of Sultan Sikandar’s policies.<sup>114</sup> Nund Rishi had launched his religio-political movement under Sultan Sikandar’s reign and had been even arrested but the Rishi Order gathered momentum during the egalitarian reign of Sultan Zayn al-‘Ābidīn who was among the mourners at his funeral in Charar. The conditions were ideal for Nund Rishi’s movement under Sultan Zayn al-‘Ābidīn.<sup>115</sup> Even though historians such as Muhammad Ishaq Khan place the

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<sup>110</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, “The Impact of Islam in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586),” 352.

<sup>111</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, xxxii.

<sup>112</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis*, 15.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>114</sup> Aziz Ahmad, “Conversion to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” 16.

<sup>115</sup> Writing about the rule of Sultan Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, the Sanskritist Walter Slaje concludes an essay on the science of history in medieval Kashmir with the following remark: “I think that for the outstanding services Zayn has rendered to both religious parties as a Muslim ruler, he deserves to be held up posthumously as an example for integrationist politics of which Kashmir is so urgently in need, torn as it is by the tensions of today.” See Walter Slaje, *Medieval Kashmir and the Science of History* (Austin: South Asia Institute, The University of Texas at Austin, 2004), 24.

Rishis at the heart of Kashmir's conversion to Islam, as noted above, Aziz Ahmad argues that the influence of the Rishis on conversion was comparatively small:

...the 'little tradition' of the Rishīs was ascetic: they lived away from urban areas either in little villages or forests. Though by the end of the fifteenth and during the sixteenth centuries they came to have a *khānqāh* with their own living saints: the influence of their order on conversion to Islam was comparatively small, compared to the ongoing conversion in the Great Tradition represented by the Hamadānī mosque and *khānqāh* and the efforts of Bayhaqi sayyids who had very soon become a militant elite.<sup>116</sup>

The tension between the Persianate Sufis and the Kashmiri Rishis was to have an enduring impact on Kashmiri society. Rafiqi asserts that the opposing approaches to Sufism in the Persian Sufis and the Kashmiri Rishis became “a latent ingredient of the Kashmiri social pattern.”<sup>117</sup> The involvement with political power of the Persian Sufis appeared to the Rishis to contradict the principles of Sufism; and for the Persian Sufis, the Rishis appeared to contradict the principles of Islam.<sup>118</sup> The Rishi- *Kubrāwiyyā* tensions evolved into Rishi-*Suhrawardī* tensions by the sixteenth century (even though there was more accommodation between the Rishi and the *Suhrawardī* Sufis). There was another consequence of the control of the Persian Sufi Orders over the Kashmiri Court: the Persianization of Kashmir which Rafiqi contends “ushered in an era of cultural conquest” leading to changes in food, dress and diet of Kashmiris.<sup>119</sup> The Rishis appear to have been working towards building a new spiritual and political community in Kashmir. Charles Ramsey reminds us that the Rishīs had “emphasized solidarity through local governance, and warned of the consequences of inviting foreign rule.”<sup>120</sup> The Rishis may

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<sup>116</sup> Aziz Ahmad, “Conversion to Islam in the Valley of Kashmir,” 18.

<sup>117</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, 248.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>120</sup> Charles M. Ramsey, “Rishīwaer: Kashmir, the Garden of Saints,” in *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*, eds. Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey (New York: Continuum, 2012), 199.

have failed but their struggle for a pan-Kashmiri political spirituality endures in Kashmiri cultural memory.

Even though it is necessary to situate Nund Rishi's poetic thinking in its historical context, I will, however, not be dealing further with the history of the Rishi movement in this dissertation. I restrict myself here, as I state at the outset, to Nund Rishi's thinking of death, the nothing, the apocalyptic, and Islam as a form of negative theology. We have so far seen that the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi not only inaugurated a vernacular literary culture in the Kashmiri language in a region dominated by Sanskrit and Persian literary cultures but it also challenged the new political order in medieval Kashmir after the establishment of a Muslim Sultanate in which the Persian Sufi Orders and the urban elite remained dominant.<sup>121</sup> Let me state clearly that I do not think that the thinking of Nund Rishi must, or can, be read solely as a negative theology. The moments of negative theology in Nund Rishi are many but are also put into question by the other more cataphatic (God-affirming) moments. Nund Rishi's mystical poetry can certainly be read in the traditional register (i.e. a devotional register which points towards the immense unnamable and unmarkable greatness of the divine) but there are moments where another register intrudes, and those are the moments that are of interest to me. These are the moments of sudden encounters that the *shruks* set up with death, the nothing, the apocalyptic and faith: the signatures of all negative theology.

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Ramsey also claims that Rishīs fought on the side of Yusuf Shah Chak against the Mughal Emperor, Akbar. Ibid. fn. 31.

<sup>121</sup> Unlike some other regions in South Asia, vernacularization in Kashmir coincides with the rise of a popular, religio-political movement, which is why we do not see a rapid proliferation of Kashmiri texts until as late as the nineteenth and twentieth century. But we do see the rise of a vernacularized Persian by the eighteenth century in Kashmir.

Negative theology is nothing less than the name saved for a long inheritance of a shared understanding of the negative path, *via negativa*, across faiths from the Greco-Roman Late Antiquity to the Islam of the medieval Indo-Persian worlds. Negative theology eludes attempts to approach its meaning because it is precisely in escaping such a determination that it establishes its field and boundaries. But minimally, let us begin with an understanding of negative theology as a discourse on the transcendent which turns on negations rather than affirmations by approaching the question of what God is from the standpoint of what God is not. Even though the historical legacy of negative theology is difficult to ignore in relation to Nund Rishi, I define negative theology not only historically but, following Michael Sells, consider it formally as a term that could designate any text that meets the requirements of its discourse.<sup>122</sup> My argument is that the thinking of the death, the nothing, the apocalyptic and Islam, the critique of theological knowledge and absolutist power, and the turn to the everyday and an ecological ethic in Nund Rishi's mystical poetry all bring us up against aporias that resemble those of negative theology. Negative theology is always this resemblance to negative theology.<sup>123</sup>

Let us also briefly consider a serious criticism which has often be levelled against negative theology. Negative theology (in its Neoplatonic, Christian, Judaic and Islamic

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<sup>122</sup> Michael Sells argues in his *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* that the mode of discourse on the transcendent in negative theology begins in an aporia which he characterizes as an "unresolvable dilemma." The aporia is that one must name the transcendent in order to even make the claim that the transcendent is beyond names. Sells envisages three possible responses to such a dilemma: a) silence b) to see how the transcendent is beyond names and not beyond names, and, c) the refusal to solve the dilemma and instead accept it as a genuine aporia i.e. as unresolvable. All of these discourses are, for Sells, negative theology. Michael A Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>123</sup> More so when we bear in mind what Jacques Derrida reminds us of about the history of negative theology: "Whatever the translations, analogies, transpositions, transferences, metaphors, never has any discourse expressly given itself this title (negative theology, apophatic method, *via negativa*) in the thoughts of Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist culture." See Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 49.

moments) has been accused of being invested in a Being beyond being, an Ultimate Being. This is the accusation that the philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida bring against negative theology.<sup>124</sup> As Derrida points out elsewhere, one is always accused of, never congratulated for, negative theology.<sup>125</sup> Yet, for Derrida, negative theology “seems to reserve, beyond all positive predication, beyond all negation, even beyond Being, some hyperessentiality, a being beyond Being...God as *without* Being.”<sup>126</sup> Jean-Luc Marion too has cautioned that it is perhaps better to speak of a “negative way” rather than a negative theology because “it is inseparable from the ‘affirmative way’ that precedes it...”<sup>127</sup> Yet it is difficult to isolate with any degree of certainty any rule or measure in this move to reserve a “Being beyond being” which is not at the same time slipping away from all predication. For the Neoplatonists, the question of Being before or beyond difference is fundamental, but the question of Being (and the Nothing) does not necessarily appear in the same way as it does in Christian and Islamic negative theology. Here too I feel one needs to approach the discontinuities and denials which rend the ‘affirmations’ of negative theology and question the accusation of a ‘hyperessentiality’ of the “Being beyond beings” as soon as it is announced. Derrida too is also not entirely pessimistic and writes: “Perhaps there is within it [negative theology], hidden, restless, diverse, and itself heterogeneous, a voluminous and nebulous multiplicity of potentials to

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<sup>124</sup> Arthur Bradley, “Thinking the outside: Foucault, Derrida and negative theology,” *Textual Practice* 16(1), 2002: 59.

<sup>125</sup> Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 144.

<sup>126</sup> Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” 147. For Derrida, the privileging of mysticism as a path to radical transcendence, a Being beyond being, remains a phase of positive ontotheology. See Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2001), 440, n.37.

<sup>127</sup> Jean Luc Marion, “What do we mean by ‘mystic’,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 6.

which the single expression ‘negative theology’ yet remains inadequate.”<sup>128</sup> This study of Nund Rishi is a way of exploring just such a heterogeneous and nebulous multiplicity within the single field of a Kashmiri mystic’s thought. Needless to add such a heterogeneous and nebulous multiplicity is already at work even in such mystics taken up by Jacques Derrida as Meister Eckhart or Angelus Silesius.

Why insist on reading the thinking of Nund Rishi as a form of negative theology? Why persist with the name of negative theology? One way in which Nund Rishi’s thinking belongs to the legacy of negative theology is, without doubt, its explicit connection to Sufism, Neoplatonism, and the thinking of the Nothing in the Buddhist tradition. Indeed it is not one negative theology which we see at play in the negative theology of Nund Rishi, but many.<sup>129</sup> Derrida’s remarks on negative theology in a late essay on the German mystic, Angelus Silesius, clarify the stakes of risking the name of negative theology for the thinking of Nund Rishi:

How would what still comes to us under the domestic, European, Greek, and Christian term of negative theology, of negative way, of apophatic discourse, be the chance of an incomparable translatability in principle without limit? Not of a universal tongue, of an ecumenism or of some consensus, but of a tongue to come that can be shared more than ever?<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Jacques Derrida, “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” 151.

<sup>129</sup> Jacob Taubes, for instance, suggests that the Gnostic *via negativa* is a link between Christian and Indian negative theology (Islam is a link in that chain which he misses).<sup>129</sup> Taubes considers the Neoplatonic teacher of Plotinus, Ammonios Sakkas, to have been a Buddhist: “Ammonios Sakkas presents the Alexandrian link between Indian (Buddhist) theology and Christian and pagan neo-Platonism and this connection explains *why* we are ‘forcibly reminded’ of Hindu and Buddhist terminology in neo-Platonic theology.” See Jacob Taubes, “The Realm of Paradox,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Mar., 1954), 485-86.

<sup>130</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 47. But Michel de Certeau warns us of the risks: “One would not therefore know how to sanction the fiction of a universal discourse about mysticism, thereby forgetting that the East Indian, the African, or the Indonesian have neither the same conception of nor the same practices for what we call mysticism.” See Michel de Certeau, “Mysticism” in *Diacritics*, Vol. 22, No. 2. (Summer, 1992), 13.

Negative theology is this possibility of ‘a tongue to come that can be shared more than ever’: it is the chance or risk of a translatability without limit.<sup>131</sup> It is, of course, much easier to approach Nund Rishi’s thinking and the politico-religious movement from which it is inseparable, as mysticism (and the term, despite its complex trajectory, I sometimes use interchangeably with negative theology because there is no absolutely cataphatic mysticism) but it is the work of negative theology in Nund Rishi’s mysticism which concerns me the most as it irrupts in Nund Rishi’s *shruks* on death, the Nothing, the apocalyptic and Islam. The moments of negative theology emerge in the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi in a way that everything else depends on it. Negative theology is the most powerful strand in Nund Rishi’s mystical poetry. The slightness of the reference corpus (a few hundred *shruks* of Nund Rishi) also should not pose a serious problem: Derrida reminds us that in negative theology, “the essential tendency is to formalizing rarefaction.”<sup>132</sup> We cannot think of Nund Rishi without the knots (*shrukī*), crossings (*tār*) and the winter (*Poh tu’ māgh*) of negative theology.

The negative theology of the Rishis in Kashmir, and I would go so far as to claim that the trajectory of negative theology in Kashmir and not merely in Rishism, emerges in a relation to moments of political crises. Gershom Scholem, the Jewish philosopher, has pointed out that the great moments of mysticism “can be identified with great moments of crisis.”<sup>133</sup> The trajectory of mystical saying and unsaying in Kashmir emerges in a

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<sup>131</sup> Jacques Derrida speaks of translation and translatability as something fundamental to deconstruction in his letter to the Japanese scholar of Qur’ān and Islamic Studies, Toshihiko Izutsu. See, Jacques Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1-6.

<sup>132</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, 49.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard, “Preface,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xii.

relation to certain persistent political themes such as contestations over the meanings of Kashmir as a place, of law and power, and the question of Islam. There is also a certain intensification in the discourses of negative theology in times of political crisis in Kashmir. The fundamental manner in which negative theology marks Sufi poetry in Kashmir is in the way it seeks to collapse the idea of total transcendence into the experience of total immanence.<sup>134</sup> The Rishi Order emerged in early fifteenth century in a Kashmir weakened by Mongol attacks, and in a state of transition marked not only by the creation and consolidation of a new Muslim State but also by religious conversions to Islam and immigration from Central Asia. As William Franke reminds us in relation with the Neoplatonic philosophy of the One (the Greek, pre-monotheistic moment of negative theology):

Negative theology arises at a very advanced stage in the development of rational reflection in any given culture, a stage where the founding myths of that culture, and lastly language itself as the foundation of all culture, come into question.<sup>135</sup>

What are the political implications of the rise of an Islamic negative theology that affirms a relation with Hindu and Buddhist negative theology at the frontiers of Islam? In the end, it is not very useful to approach this question by tracing the influence of this or that tradition of negative theology on Nund Rishi; instead it is perhaps more productive to see the unfolding tradition of apophasis in Kashmir as informed by competing trajectories of mystical and negative theology. As Michael Sells argues in his comparative study of negative theology in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*,

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<sup>134</sup> Clearly medieval Kashmir – a hotbed of *Kubrāwīyyā* missionary activity – was well-versed with the works of Ibn al-‘Arabi (1165-1240) as disseminated through the teachings of Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī.

<sup>135</sup> William Franke, “Apophasis and the Turn of Philosophy to Religion: From Neoplatonic Theology to Postmodern Negation of Theology,” in “Self and Other: Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 60, No. 1/3, (Dec., 2006): 64.

even if apophatic discourse is grounded in particular traditions, it often opens onto inter-religious conversation.<sup>136</sup> It is this situation of an “inter-religious conversation” which is responsible for the sudden flowering of Muslim negative theology at the frontiers of the Islamic world in Kashmir. There has been very little attention to the upsurge of negative theology in Kashmir at a time of transition from a Hindu-Buddhist milieu to Muslim rule: renewed focus on not just the philosophy of Nund Rishi but also the enlightened rule of Sultan Zayn al-‘Ābidīn could even offer clues in thinking about the current crisis in Kashmir. The practice of the mystics to go beyond what is permissible, or even accessible (often to return empty-handed), Jacques Derrida elsewhere has called “apophatic boldness”<sup>137</sup> Derrida writes:

...apophatic boldness always consists in going further than is reasonably permitted. That is one of the essential traits of all negative theology: passing to the limit, then crossing a frontier, including that of a community, thus of a sociopolitical, institutional, ecclesial reason or *raison d'être*.<sup>138</sup>

Can this thinking of crossing frontiers open onto the vision of a new, and possible, community, just as it did in the fifteenth century?

Michel de Certeau ventures a fascinating hypothesis about the upsurge of mysticism in sixteenth and seventeenth-century France: “Just as the massive adoption of German culture by the Jews in the nineteenth century made possible theoretic innovations and an exceptional intellectual productivity, the upsurge of *mystics* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was often the effect of the Jewish difference in the usage of a Catholic idiom.”<sup>139</sup> I venture that the upsurge of mysticism in fourteenth and fifteenth

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<sup>136</sup> Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 13.

<sup>137</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, 36.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 23.

century Kashmir owed much to the effect of a Hindu difference in an Islamic idiom. This is certainly suggested by the very name *rishī* of the Sufi Order founded by Nund Rishi. My proposition then is that it is this Rishi thinking of the negative that grounds a possible relation between Muslim negative theology and its others in medieval Kashmir, and drives the rise of the Kashmiri vernacular from the language of the everyday to a language of poetic and religious expression. This way of thinking need not be construed merely as a neo-syncretist impulse but is a possibility inherent in negative theology in any mystical tradition.

I approach the Rishi thought in general, and Nund Rishi's negative theology in particular, as a mode of understanding the world which never formalized itself into a body of doctrine but instead founded in the Kashmiri tradition a mode of what Michael Sells has called 'mystical saying and unsaying.'<sup>140</sup> Such a tradition is incapable of formalizing a doctrine. This is perhaps the reason we find few traces of the Order's historical trajectory except through and in the history of the other Sufi Orders such as the *Suhrawardiyyā* and the *Kubrāwiyyā* with relatively more stable records and archives. The Rishi Order did not attain the formalization and institutionalization which is typical of other Sufi Orders because it never systematized its teachings or surrendered its asceticism. Negative theology has, in any case, always appeared only as a possibility within different traditions without typically forming or congealing into schools.<sup>141</sup> But as soon we speak of a Christian negative theology in medieval Germany or Muslim negative theology in medieval Kashmir, we are tempted to ask the question: Is negative theology

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<sup>140</sup> Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 3.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

one or many? Jacques Derrida addresses this question in *'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials'* where he concedes that the unity of the legacy of negative theology is difficult to delimit.<sup>142</sup> The emergence of negative theologies across geographical and religious boundaries in medieval Eurasia also poses a difficult question about the time and place of negative theology. Most radical exponents of negative theology across Eurasia flourished at a time of vernacularization and the transition from the pre-modern to early modern ways of life.<sup>143</sup> If Nund Rishi's negative theology was a part of larger discourse of Islamic mysticism in South Asia, it also emerged at a time when the *bhaktī* movement was gaining ground in North India. The Indian poet and scholar A. K. Ramanujan reads such moments in the history of medieval South Asia as "anti-contextual" movements: as movements which think new universals that are not context-specific.<sup>144</sup>

We witness across medieval South Asia attempts to challenge political power in the name of a new thinking grounded in a personal relation to the transcendent which opens up the political to the demands of the subaltern. The negative theology of Nund Rishi must then not merely be read as one articulation among others of the 'negative path' across regions in medieval Europe and Asia, but as a mode of approaching the question of the political from the standpoint of "the negative determination of God."<sup>145</sup>

We must also keep in mind yet another helpful elucidation by Michel de Certeau: "There

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<sup>142</sup> Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," 143.

<sup>143</sup> Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate, "Echoes of an Embarrassment: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology – An Introduction," in *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*, eds. Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 6-7.

<sup>144</sup> A. K. Ramanujan, "Is there an Indian way of thinking? An Informal Essay" *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 23 (41): 54. Sudipta Kaviraj, in a recent essay, has suggested that we must consider the moments of vernacularization in medieval India as the beginning of "something like European modernity." See Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Sudden Death of Sanskrit Knowledge," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33 (2005): 120.

<sup>145</sup> Jacques Derrida, "How to avoid speaking: Denials," 74.

is a rural and urban register of mystical experience.”<sup>146</sup> An elite and subaltern register of mystical experience. And what he says about the mystics of sixteenth and seventeenth-century France is as true of the Rishi movement in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Kashmir: “A subterranean organization was brought to light, unveiling and multiplying the resources of a peasant tradition within the very mystical experience that sprang from it.”<sup>147</sup> What does “mystical experience” mean outside the elite, urban register? This is the question that Nund Rishi entrusts us.

Negative theology pushes language to its limits only to remain open to that about which it cannot say anything. There is a wide range of texts that share in this condition, and a renewal of interest in these texts in Kashmir reflects the situation of a crisis in the contemporary. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, I develop the relations between a thinking of death and the apocalyptic in relation to the language of a spiritual and political crisis. The thinking of death which I develop in Chapter 2 is unique to Nund Rishi in the Kashmiri mystical tradition and I interpret it through the lens of two early essays on Nund Rishi by the Kashmiri poet and critic Rahman Rahi. Chapter 4 explores the tensions between ontology and eschatology in Nund Rishi’s thought. In Chapter 3, I take up the theme of Nothing in Nund Rishi’s mystical poetry in relation to the Sufi call to “die before you die.” We shall see in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 that this was not merely a call to an ethical self-transformation but also a political transformation that opens up collective life in the new Sultanate to possible forms of coexistence. In Chapter 5, I situate Nund Rishi’s

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<sup>146</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Mysticism” in *Diacritics*, Vol. 22, No. 2. (Summer, 1992), 21.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

negative theology in relation to debates about Sufism and *Sharī'ah* where Nund Rishi's Islam emerges as a form of negative theology.

## Chapter 2

### Practicing Death: Closing Time

*Rozi tam sund nāv* (Nothing shall remain: save His name) — A Kashmiri Saying.

Everything will perish save His countenance: *Qur'ān* 28:88.

...these mystics are, I believe, those who have been true philosophers. And I in my life have, so far as I could, left nothing undone, and have striven in every way to make myself one of them. – Socrates, *Phaedo*.<sup>148</sup>

Death is the fundamental theme of Nund Rishi's poetry.<sup>149</sup> This insight from Rahman Rahi's seminal essay *Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath* (The Poetic Personality of Shaikh al-'Ālam) is developed here in relation to Rahi's extended reading of Nund Rishi and the thinking of death in Continental thought. The reason I develop this thinking of death isomorphically across different traditions of thought is to better approach the stakes involved in reading Nund Rishi's negative theology as a powerful discourse on death. To borrow Rahman Rahi's title for the critical collection in which the essay on the thinking of death in Nund Rishi appears, death is the true *kahavat* (touchstone) for Nund Rishi's thinking.

Let us recall Nund Rishi's prayer from one of his *shruks*: *Yiman padan mye vjetsār gotshiy* (These verses call to thinking). Nund Rishi calls his readers to a thinking (*vjetsār*) on his *padas* (verses). Much has remained unthought in Nund Rishi's *padās* (or *shruks*) but what remains inescapable for any reader of Nund Rishi is the sudden encounter that the *shruks* set up with death. Nund Rishi hurls his reader on a collision course with the inevitability of death that reaches out from everywhere on earth: dry clay

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<sup>148</sup> Plato, "Phaedo," in Plato, *Euthyphro Apology Crito Phaedo Phaedrus*, translated by Harold North Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 241.

<sup>149</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath" in *Kahvat: Tanqīdī mazmūnan ḥanz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 143.

vessels that instantaneously absorb water, the shops which are abandoned at closing time or the lightning that descends down from the sky (as the domes that shudder or the thunder which strikes) reducing human being(s) to nothing. I invoke Rahi's reading at the outset because his essay published in 1978 is the first to trace the path of an interpretation I develop further here: the fundamental theme, the arche-theme, of Nund Rishi's poetry, is death. Let us turn to Rahi's own words from his essay:

One can get a better idea of the extraordinary form of *Shaikh al- 'Ālam*'s experience and his overwhelming truth from those of his verses which deal with death. Death is a universal truth and there is hardly any language in the world which does not illuminate one or the other of its aspects. Even many poets of Kashmiri have expressed their own responses to death from different perspectives. The singularity of *Shaikh al- 'Ālam* is in this that he does not limit himself to a speaking or narrating of death, or present it in a unique way as it appears to his solitary imagining, but rather recognizes death approach him in such a slow and calm manner that an awe-inspiring encounter appears before our eyes which eventually grips the reader in its tight embrace (*komu' rattān che*). This is neither an ordinary experience and nor is the expression of *Shaikh al- 'Ālam* ordinary. It is a living possibility from which escape is impossible...<sup>150</sup>

Rahi speaks of the fear of the subject held captive by death in its sudden, intimate embrace. The uncanny encounter with death turns life into a ghostly existence. A sudden fog descends down on the light of the day, envelopes everything, paralyses life, and all that remains is a waiting for death. Rahi approaches this death in his phenomenology of metaphors:

My inner experience and I had been blessed with a light but something happened all of a sudden which shrouds the light in a soot of darkness. The darkness enveloped me all of a sudden from all sides, and pushed me deeper into its embrace, and then before my eyes moved the stealthy, calm and slow-moving shadow of a hesitant thief. And I who am already trapped in this dragnet, it does not really matter if I also now close my eyes. The one with the wolf-face who affects love for me and yet waits for me in hunt is a hungry lion whose embrace is unbearable and grip limitless.<sup>151</sup>

Rahi traces Nund Rishi's thinking of death through a close reading of the *shruks* which deal with death and I shall follow his interpretations of these *shruks* as I develop my own.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 143-44.

Rahi first introduces Nund Rishi as a spiritual practitioner (*'āmil*), mystic (*'ārif*) and a spiritual leader (*dīnī peshwā*) who makes manifest the life of a multilayered (*tahdār*) and a multi-hued (*rang bastu*) culture.<sup>152</sup> One should not get distracted by the rhetorical strategies of Rahi, as he can move fast between a conservative critical idiom to a devastating critique of tradition with far-reaching implications. The task he explicitly sets out for himself in this essay is circumscribed to address a gap in the critical scholarship on Nund Rishi.<sup>153</sup> Rahi announces that he is going to restrict himself to the figure of Nund Rishi as a poet, or in his own words, to the poetic person of Nund Rishi. One of the reasons Rahi gives for the neglect that Nund Rishi has received in twentieth-century Kashmiri language scholarship is that it was only as late as 1968 that the first critical edition of a collection of Nund Rishi's poetry was edited and published by Amin Kamil for the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages.<sup>154</sup> Rahi begins by tracing two critical interventions in the reception of Nund Rishi's poetry in the twentieth century: 1) in the literary history of the Marxist poet and critic Abdul Ahad Azad (*Kashmīrī Zabān aur Shā'iri*), and 2) in the collection of essays, *Studies in Kashmiri*, by J. L. Kaul.

By invoking the similarities and differences in these two early critical approaches to Nund Rishi, Rahi opens up a different path to reading Nund Rishi. Rahi begins by reminding us that Abdul Ahad Azad (1903-48) is the first critical commentator on Nund Rishi's poetry who attempts a reading of Nund Rishi in relation to the elements of poetry (*aṣnāf-e sukhan*) and its themes (*moṣū*). According to Rahi, Azad expresses a pure literary judgment when, setting aside Nund Rishi's high mystical (*ārifānā*) station and

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

religious provenance (*manṣab*), Azad suggests that at the moment Nund Rishi speaks of pure religious principles in his *shruks* poetry does not come to his aid, and even if it does, it does so as the reason and rhetoric of an expert religious teacher (*mubaligh*) even as *au contraire* spontaneous emotion pours forth from his heart (*ath bar'aks chi farārī jazbāth tihendi dilu' manzu' bukiu' karith tshat divān*).<sup>155</sup> Rahi struggles in the rest of his essay to move beyond Azad's interpretation of Nund Rishi even as he strives to retain Azad's advice of approaching him primarily as a poet. The difficulty of Rahi's task is that he does not always restrict himself to only this task in the essay but also approaches Nund Rishi's mysticism from the standpoint of his poetry. Rahi searches for a way to hold mysticism and poetry together in his reading of Nund Rishi under the signs of literature and death. Maurice Blanchot could be expressing the inexpressible about the world of experience that opens out to us in Nund Rishi's mystical poetry when he speaks of the relations between literary Saying and death:

My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address: it is there between us as the distance that separates us, but this distance is also what prevents us from being separated, because it contains the condition for all understanding. Death alone allows me to grasp what I want to attain; it exists in words as the only way they can have meaning. Without death, everything would sink into absurdity and nothingness.<sup>156</sup>

It is this ontological primacy of death that we encounter in Nund Rishi's mystical poetry. Rahman Rahi, in principle, affirms Abdul Ahad Azad's move of reading Nund Rishi as a poet, but hastens to add that Azad's reading of Nund Rishi remains provisional and leaves us with an extreme thirst for more.<sup>157</sup> Rahi then turns to yet another serious study

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Maurice Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Death" in Maurice Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, tr. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 323-324.

<sup>157</sup> Rahman Rahi, "*Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣṣiyath*," 137-38.

of Nund Rishi's poetry by J. L. Kaul in his *Studies in Kashmiri* where this author suggests that most of Nund Rishi *shruks* are thematically didactic and tonally admonitory, and the poetic utterance in these *shruks* reveal those points of wisdom (*hakīmānā noqtu*) and such scaled and measured Sayings (*mīnith tūlith*), which have become proverbial in Kashmir and enriched the language.<sup>158</sup> For Kaul, this proverbial measure of Nund Rishi, nonetheless, is also the limit of his poetry. Kaul concedes that the Kashmiri language remains indebted to Nund Rishi but reserves a final judgment on his poetry. As I have already indicated above, Rahi compares these two early views of Azad and Kaul as a point of departure for his own attempt to retrieve Nund Rishi as a poet and a thinker beyond the preacher (*mubaligh*) of Azad and the sermonizer (*vā'iz*) of Kaul. But Rahi adds that Azad is much more cautious in his judgment than Kaul in not expressing a resounding (*vā'yith*) and explicit (*tshatith*) opinion (*rāi*) but instead stresses on the distinction between the poetry of religious confession and the poetry of spontaneous emotion, which yields a dual exalting (*tamjīdi*) and critical (*tanqīsī*) narrative.<sup>159</sup> Rahi argues that the limit Azad sets (that even in those *shruks* which are religious but also aided by the poetic, Nund Rishi succumbs to the reason of an avid preacher) can in itself be a productive limit.<sup>160</sup> Even as Kaul, according to Rahi, brings up the didactic thematic and admonitory tone of Nund Rishi and restricts himself to points of wisdom and the scaled and measured Sayings that reveal the riches of Kashmiri language, Azad also pays attention to the sermonic brilliance (*vā'izānā shān*) of Shaikh's confessional poetry.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

Rahi seems to be straining to reconcile faith and poetry in Nund Rishi, which has clear autobiographical resonances that acquire dramatic tension in his own recent collection of poems *Siyāh rūdu' jaryen manz*.<sup>162</sup> The third important point (which emerges from these early assessments of Nund Rishi's poetry) is the question if at all the didactic themes and admonitory tone so overwhelms Nund Rishi's poetry that we need no longer keep anything else in mind while evaluating the whole oeuvre of Nund Rishi.<sup>163</sup> Rahi asks:

Are there no *shruks* in Hazrat Shaikh's poetry which bear the criterion of real poetic value? Or are such *shruks* so few in number that, even in a critical evaluation, these are taken to be exceptions or accidents, and therefore, neglected? I think only by finding an answer to this question can we satisfactorily attempt a critical evaluation of *Shaikh al-'Alam's* poetry and only by recognizing the poetic personality of Hazrat Shaikh in a real sense can we finally decide his true stature in the firmament of Kashmiri poetry.<sup>164</sup>

Rahi then turns to Amin Kamil's 1968 edition of *Nūrnāmu'* — the first critical collection of verse by Shaikh al-'Alam to be published — in the foreword to which Kamil divides Nund Rishi's poetry into three broad themes: Islamic, Sufi, and philosophical. In an unusually strident critique of Kamil, Rahi writes: "Leaving aside the matter that these three divisions are not reliable because something can be Islamic, Sufi, philosophical and everything else at the same time, it calls our attention that some people turn to Islamic and unIslamic imaginations as the touchstone (*kahavat*) for understanding and evaluating literature and thus estimating its position and value."<sup>165</sup> Rahi further suggests that just because Nund Rishi's *shruks* mirror the examined faith and desire of a true Muslim, it is not necessary that the *shruks* should also therefore count as an example of good poetry: "The conflict and depth of a poetic persona cannot be gauged from the security of the

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<sup>162</sup> Rahman Rahi, *Siyāh rūdu' jaryen manz* (Srinagar: self-published, 1997). Both the first and the last *nazm* in this collection of poems deals with the question of faith.

<sup>163</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath," 138.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 138-39.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 139.

poet's faith or the heights of his or her ambition."<sup>166</sup> For Rahi, it is the aporias, or the knots, of the *shruks* that call our thinking.<sup>167</sup> Rahi quotes two *shruks* with opposed meanings, and which taken together, reveal a paradoxical approach to the question of Islam in relation to Hinduism in Nund Rishi to caution against too literal a reading of Nund Rishi (and also warns us about the difficulty of reading questions of faith in Nund Rishi's poetry). Rahi first quotes the following *shruk*:

*Ākis mālis māji handyēn*  
*Timan da 'y trāvith ti kyāy*  
*Musalmānan kyāv hendyēn*  
*Kar bandan toshi khoday*<sup>168</sup>

They are born of the same parents  
 Why would God abandon them?  
 To both the Muslims and the Hindus  
 May God send his blessings

Rahi then contrasts this with another *shruk* (there are slight variations of this *shruk* in different published collections):

*Rindo hendyēn ḥanz kāmī trāvito*  
*Trāvito prāvito ḥaqu' su'nz vath*  
*Ḥazrat Muḥammad matu' maṣhrāvito*  
*Asi nin nāras timan rozi kath*<sup>169</sup>

Friends, abandon the path of the Hindus  
 Abandon their path to find the path of truth  
 Don't forget Hazrat Muḥammad  
 For we will be hauled to Hell, but he will be embarrassed for us

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>167</sup> Unlike Rahi, I consider Kamil's schema useful in identifying the three basic trends in Nund Rishi's poetry: Islamic, Sufi and philosophical. If the Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this dissertation turn more on a philosophical Nund Rishi, Chapter 5 will address the Sufism (and Islam) of Nund Rishi's poetry.

<sup>168</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath," 140.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

The point is not whether either, or both, of the above are later interpolations, or if literal readings of these verses are adequate, but that both now belong to the Nund Rishi corpus in ways that nonetheless offer clues to Nund Rishi's thinking on these questions as we become acquainted with similar movements in the rest of the *shruks*. One of the ways to read such a corpus, as Rahi suggests, is to not merely to reduce it to an expression of this or that philosophical or religious outlook but to judge it on the *kahavat* (touchstone) of literature. Rahi quotes the two *shruks* to reveal the undecidability involved in reading them and insists on a paradoxical thinking in the internally differentiated thematic of the *shruks* which makes it difficult to reduce Nund Rishi's thinking into a belief-system.<sup>170</sup> Rahi adds that critical decisions on literary texts must in the end also necessarily involve considerations other than literary appraisals but literature must be first judged on literature's touchstone.<sup>171</sup>

Even though Rahi refuses to engage with Nund Rishi's stature as one of Kashmir's greatest Sufi saints, he remains undecided about the place of Sufi mystical theology in any critical evaluation of Nund Rishi's poetic oeuvre. The question remains then as to what might be involved in judging Nund Rishi solely on literature's touchstone. It is clear that Rahi is not calling for literary criticism or some other aesthetic or hermeneutic operation. Rahi proposes that we turn to the language of Nund Rishi in order to develop an understanding of his thinking. Rahi writes:

The fundamental potentiality of literature is in debt of its process of creation. The elements which give birth to this process, of these elements the most important is the miracle-working

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<sup>170</sup> Even as Rahi concedes that the latter verse appears oppositional (*vulte*), he draws the following conclusion: "*Magar toti hyekov nau' mahaz avu' mōkhu' yiman shāran ḥandīs quvatas yā kotāhi mutalliḡ kānh fāslu' sādīr qarīth* (But nonetheless we cannot easily decide between the potentiality or error of these two verses)." Rahman Rahi, "*Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath*," 140.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

of language and the poetic saying which depends on the gift of the passion of creative imagination that makes possible the reappropriation of experience, and very nearly, the creation of experience itself and even its understanding.<sup>172</sup>

But Rahi also sounds a word of caution. There is no easy way into the language of

Nund Rishi:

Reading and judging Hazrat-e Shaikh's poetry, it is important to bear in mind that Hazrat Shaikh is fundamentally a Rishi and a Sufi of deep meanings because of which the overall air (*kulham fizā*) of his experience is extraordinary (*ghār momūli*). Like most poets, he does not array his poetry in human love, longing, or revenge. Nor does he clothe everyday experience in the garment of poetry. In his best moments, Hazrat-e Shaikh, instead of desiring recognition for his self from you or us finds his self face-to-face before the Six Directions and the creator of universe.<sup>173</sup>

Rahi has one more advice about reading Nund Rishi: we cannot pay attention to the language of Nund Rishi without taking into account the reality that continuously for four to five hundred years, much of Shaikh al-'Alam's poetry has passed into the Kashmiri language:

We must pay attention to the corpus of Nund Rishi's verses and in a way that keeps close the reality that, because of our being dull of hearing and constant repetitions over four to five hundred years, much of Hazrat Shaikh's poetry has passed into the everyday idiom of Kashmiri language in a way in which the sense of the life and attraction of its sounds and words, the allure and effect of the meaning-creation of its tones and the potentiality of experience to retrieve hidden meanings which are embodied in it has become difficult in much the same way that it is difficult to experience the originary potentiality for creation that lies dormant in any proverb which has become overworn by use in any language.<sup>174</sup>

Rahi trains the reader's ears for Nund Rishi's language so as to retrieve the force of the poetic utterance, which has become obscure from its being overworn through use in everyday life. As Rahi puts it: "The truth is that many of the Sheikh *shruks* are like sleeping embers in the ash and until the soot that has settled on these embers is shaken off, we cannot have a proper estimate of their light or heat."<sup>175</sup>

Rahi's alternative path to Nund Rishi is not to wait for the poet's 'Alexandrian

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 140-41.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

assault' (*sikandarānā sanjūn*) on meaning but in the following advice about reading from the nineteenth-century working-class Sufi poet, Wahab Khār:

*Shamā zajom hati ke rate  
Su gahe zulmāt pyom  
Tath zulmātas lāl kyāh chatte  
Su kas pate gom*<sup>176</sup>

I light the candle with the blood of my throat  
Such is the darkness that enveloped me  
The jewels keep shining in the darkness  
Where has the Beloved gone?

By quoting Wahab Khār here, Rahman Rahi reminds us that the act of reading is a painful activity, a struggle, in which one must search for the scattered meaning even as the horizons of meaning recede into darkness. Such courage of reading is in itself evoked in the following *shruk*:

*Yath wāve hāley tsong kus zāle  
Tilu' kani zālhas 'ilm tu' dīn*<sup>177</sup>

Who would light a lamp in this room?  
In place of oil, I would burn faith and knowledge

Rahi warns that any attempt to read Nund Rishi as a poet need not be construed as a rejection of Kashmiri tradition's understanding of him as a great mystic. The question hidden in Rahi's insistence that we read Nund Rishi as a poet (even if not only as a poet) is the question of literature. But Rahi has barely posed this question before he turns to the thinking of death in Nund Rishi. This too is perhaps inevitable. The thinking of death in Nund Rishi is, as it is in Rahi, not merely a turn to the problems of philosophy or religion

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>177</sup> Qari Saifuddin, *Guldasta: Kalām-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Maktaba 'Ilm o adab, 1994), 80. Cited in a different translation in A. H. Tak, *The Eternal Verities: Shaikh Nooruddin Noorani and his Poetry* (Srinagar: Ashraf Book Centre, 1996), 33.

but rather the question of the singularity of literature. The question of death is then not merely a question of philosophy or religion but also the question of literature itself. Rahi's rejection of an easy opposition between literature and mysticism, poetry and philosophy, brings us to the threshold of the question of negative theology as a powerful discourse on death. Negative theology, as a possibility in poetry and philosophy, then appears as bound up with the question of literature.

How then does one approach the singularity of Nund Rishi's poetry? Why poetry? Rahi has suggested in different essays that Lal Ded surpasses Nund Rishi as a poet but yet he finds himself deeply engaged with Nund Rishi's poetry.<sup>178</sup> This is not necessarily an impulse to conserve Nund Rishi but a provocation that we perhaps have as yet not learned to read Nund Rishi. Not knowing how to approach the singular event of Nund Rishi's poetry, Rahi is tempted to turn to a Sufi hermeneutic:

It is not about narrating an idea nor is it about lending a feeling to a thought. This is about the reappropriation of an experience which is singular, untouched, and unspeakable. This is not the story of beholding a fairy-faced or a kohl-eyed person but rather it is the extraordinary experience of encountering the creator of the universe, of annihilating one's self in seeing the creator's unity.<sup>179</sup>

Rahi turns to a more metaphorical language to create a vivid image of this experience:

A limitless heat and light that human reason cannot even imagine: it is the experience of drinking the whole ocean in a single gulp.<sup>180</sup>

The Sufi narrative about the self, its stages on a journey, its annihilation and revival, is one way we can approach Nund Rishi's poetry, but he himself rarely turns to spiritual

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<sup>178</sup> See Rahman Rahi, "Lal D'yed tau' Shaikh al-'Ālam: Akh sarsarī taqobulī muṭālu'," in *Kahvat: Tanqīdī mazmūnan haṅz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 120.

<sup>179</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath," 143.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

autobiography. No doubt there are autobiographical elements in the *shruks* but these do not trace the contours of an inner experience as they do in Lal Ded.<sup>181</sup> Perhaps it is better to turn to this simple advice of Rahi: "...in order properly to get a measure of the real potential of Shaikh al-‘Ālam’s poetry, it is necessary to study it word for word, by time and again diving into it, so that the world of thinking and emotion which lies dormant in the shadow of the words springs back to life.”<sup>182</sup> This is great advice in a situation where some of Nund Rishi’s language has become obscure for the modern Kashmiri reader. Rahi speaks of the relation between poetry and thinking as a way into the unity of poet’s experience:

Poetry is like a snail and just like a snail perceives things by very slowly and carefully feeling its way and spreading its touch in the surroundings, much in the same way a poet brings words into play to seek the subject of his poetry, or the shape of his experience, of which, before composing his verses, he had only a faint or ambiguous perception. It is clear that to reach the soul of such verses, the reader must touch every word of the poet with the fingertips of feeling, ponder over their meaning in the depths of thinking and raise them to the heights of creative imagination so that he too may discover the magic of the poet’s fundamental experience as a unity.<sup>183</sup>

Rahman Rahi turns to just such a close reading of Nund Rishi’s poetry to bring to life what he calls Nund Rishi’s philosophical and affective worlds (*fiqrī tu’ jazbāti duniyā*) and proceeds to give us powerful readings of some of the *shruks*.<sup>184</sup> I will follow Rahi’s interpretation of some key *shruks* from Nund Rishi and then develop some of these interpretations. Let us begin with one of these *shruks*:

*Kyāh tagi motas tu’ motu’ k̄yen k̄ānan*  
*Kaman javānan chhāngu’ r peyi*  
*Ponī zan shrapey nav̄yen bānan*

<sup>181</sup> See, for instance, the introduction to Ranjit Hoskote’s translations of Lal Ded. Ranjit Hoskote, *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Dēd* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), ix-lxvii.

<sup>182</sup> Rahman Rahi, “*Shaikh al ‘Ālam sanz shā’irānā ḥaṣiyath,*” 144.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-50.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

*Vāṇi dith vānan phālav gayi*<sup>185</sup>

What can Death do or its ruses?  
Death shattered our youth  
The way water is absorbed by new clay vessels  
The way shops are abandoned at closing time

Here Nund Rishi appears, in a way not entirely dissimilar from Lal Ded, to have cultivated an indifference to death. The *shruk* opens with a paradoxical assertion of death's power but the second line recognizes the sheer helplessness of the self before the rain of arrows from death. The second line is in mourning for the youth devoured by untimely death: the way new and dry clay vessels absorb drops of water. A remorse rises to the surface here in the recognition of the death-work of life. The verb *chhāngu'r peyn* in the second line invokes the sudden scattering-shattering of death of every 'we.' The image is that of a lightning falling on something that shatters and scatters everything. The youth on which such a lightning has fallen are recalled with love and melancholy. The last line conjures up the image of a deserted street where the iron crossbars (*phālav*) on the shops are the only trace of the shopkeepers that have left the bazaar. The overall effect of death is captured in this last line, it is the effect of death for the living: *Vāṇi dith vānan phālav gayi* (The way shops are abandoned at closing time). The haunting absence in the image voids the possibility of any return. The image of the iron, or wooden, crossbar (*phālav*) suggests a finality to the end and the unforeseen ways death suddenly, and without warning, interrupts life. The end of the *shruk* reveals the world as a bazaar which is approaching closing time. The bazaar becomes a staging ground for this new thinking of death. The work of death is routine in its everydayness: the image of death as

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

a closing time for the bazaar of life underlines the violence, decisiveness, and finality with which life comes to an end. The time-image of an abandoned bazaar on a desolate street also recollects a sense of waiting for all those who left never to return and are now not even remembered in the bustle of the everyday. Death is a waiting, a ruin of time. One can only encounter death in the traces of its work: the violence of the arrows which strike down the youth, the absorption of the water droplets by a new and dry clay vessel, the desolation of the bazaar after closing time. Yet the becoming-death of life is paradoxically challenged by Nund Rishi when he suggests that death is blundering and it knows nothing. This is closer to Lal Ded who in one of her *vākhs* says *Māran kasū tu' māran kas* (who will they kill and who will die?). But Nund Rishi affirms the reality of death for a transcendental end: the ruination of death is contingent. Even though Nund Rishi paints a vivid and terrifying picture of physical death, he also reassures his reader elsewhere of immortality:

*Athu' zu' tuvith khōr zu' vahārith*  
*Ninam duniyahich lolār trāvith kath*  
*Gar'e ninam gīhe bār trāvith*  
*Yinam and mazār sāvith kath*  
*Nundyen hūru' thavan valu' lāvith*  
*Dū' thyen dozakhan nār tāvith kath*<sup>186</sup>

Your hands folded and your feet stretched out  
 You will be taken away from the attachments of the world and how?  
 They will take you from home  
 And abandon you in the graveyard  
 The good will return to the houris of Paradise  
 And for the evil: a smoldering Hell.

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<sup>186</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 40.

In many of his verses, Nund Rishi turns to such Islamic themes of death and resurrection such as punishment in the grave, the encounter with the Angels *Nakīr* and *Munkar*, the *barzākh*, and the Day of Judgement and the immortals of Heaven and Hell. The inevitability of Death, its sheer inescapability, is reinforced in the following *shruk* which points out that death did not even spare the great saints:

*Yas oru' yāmun yor vas' ē*  
*Tas ha'e ālam vadi lasi mo*  
*Dāyan gazan tal yus tsas' ē*  
*Su hae valī āsi khasi mo*<sup>187</sup>

On someone on whom the Angel of Death descends  
 Even if the whole world mourns for him, will he be spared?  
 Anyone who sinks into his two and a half yards  
 Even if a saint, will he be able to return?

There is another version of this *shruk* which uses *nabī* (Prophet) instead of *valī* (saint) underlying the same truth about death. Death is the great equalizer, the true universal.

The use of the term *Yāmun* is ambiguous: it invokes *Yāma*, the Hindu god of death, but also hints at the Angel '*Izrā'īl* who in the Islamic tradition is tasked by God to collect individual souls at death. This is one of the many moments of translation from the Islamic to the Hindu-Buddhist conceptual terminology that we come across in Nund Rishi's oeuvre. The fundamental message is universal: death is inescapable for everyone and the only true certitude in life. Nund Rishi clearly further bolsters this idea by speaking of the death of Prophet Muhammad:

*Haṣrat Muḥammad dayi sund pyāro*  
*Damu' damu' Jibrīl yār tas*  
*Tam yeli sakhar qar tot pāro*  
*Dap tu' duniyāh sor chu kas*<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 36.

Prophet Muhammad: the Beloved of God  
The angel Gabriel his friend for every breath  
If he made preparations for his end  
Tell me, for whom does the world never end?

In his essay on Nund Rishi, Rahi turns to three different moments and moods of the poet's thinking of Death to caution against a simple reading of it as a rehearsal of Islamic themes on death and resurrection. Rahi quotes the following three *shruks* to suggest different paths through Nund Rishi on the question of death:

1.

*Veshi dar yali grezith yiyam*  
*Adu' man tsalyem sandānu'*  
*Bhugi'u' shōdi manu' lazi kū'ts gatshyem*  
*Chuham tseytas tsu' meharbānu*<sup>189</sup>

The one with the poison would come upon me with a roar  
It is then that my mind will leave the body  
How I shall be humiliatingly reduced to heart's purity?  
I do remember the Gracious One

2.

*Kyah tagi motas tu' motu' kyen kānan*  
*Kaman javānan chhāngu'r peyi*  
*Ponī zan shrapey navyen bānan*  
*Vānī dith vānan phālav gayi*<sup>190</sup>

What can Death do or its ruses?  
Death shattered our youth  
The way water is absorbed by new clay vessels  
The way shops are abandoned at closing time

3.

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<sup>189</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath," 144.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

*Shogu' tsali nīrith panzar mathyem*  
*Lōti lōti tulnam hā hā kār*  
*Āru'val posh zan badan shithyem*  
*Bār khōdāyā pāp nivār*<sup>191</sup>

The bird will fly away and the cage close in  
Slowly there will be a hue and cry  
like the flower *Āru'val*, my body will freeze  
God, ease my burden

We have already introduced the second *shruk* but I retain it here to consider it together with the other two *shruks* Rahi interprets. Here is Rahman Rahi's interpretation of the three *shruks*:

1. To call the messenger of death the bearer of poison and then to hear the roar of his arrival and fearful that the time has come, and the heart which you spent your whole life indulging, to be abandoned by that cowardly heart to a helplessness, and then in this feeling of helplessness to appear before the Merciful presence of God, pure of intent and overwhelmed by shame, these allied feelings, shapes and forms turn Shaikh's poetic experience into an ecstatic situation.
2. In the second *shruk*, Death appears in the form of a hunter who, at the height of the summer of youth, rains down arrows without mercy. They were such buoyant, joyful youth but in no time, shocked and bewildered, they were scattered and their state before death was like that of small droplets of water which are quickly absorbed by a new and dry claypot. There are also those affluent youth, who before death cast its shadow over them, their shops were the pride and splendor of the bazaar, but now you truly see the whole world in a different light. There is nothing left here: the shopkeepers have disappeared, the shops are empty in the surrounding devastation, and neither can you hear a murmur nor a sound.
3. A similar graphic image is hidden in the third *shruk*. Please imagine a small child who truly cares for a strange bird of colorful plumage. He expects that there would be a time when the bird will regale him with its sweet speech. But when the time draws near, without even raising the slightest suspicion, suddenly the bird escapes. The child slowly becomes conscious of his sudden loss and starts crying and wailing loudly. But in the end the child's body becomes pale like an *āru'val* flower.<sup>192</sup>

Rahi develops some of Nund Rishi's metaphors in his interpretations and indeed it is possible to forget if one is on the trail of the poetic thinking of Nund Rishi or Rahman Rahi. But we certainly get a better sense of the world in which Nund Rishi's death is at

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath," 144-145. The numbering is my own, but Rahi interprets these *shruks* together and in sequence.

work. If death has such a menacing countenance and there is no escape from it; it is also a healing. Life is a disease healed by the sweet gift of death:

*Marg chui sau'h tu' kotū tsalīze*  
*Kheli manz kadi tsārith kaṭh*  
*Margu'c sharbath canu' ros nu' bālze*  
*Suli kyethu' gayās māṛith kath*<sup>193</sup>

Death is like a lion you can no longer escape  
It will find the sheep from the herd  
Death is a sweet drink without which you shall not heal  
Why did I not understand this sooner?

We witness in Nund Rishi not merely a thinking but a practice of death: *marnu' ros bālze no* (“You will not be cured without dying”). Nund Rishi is, to borrow the phrase Ravinder Raj Singh uses for Socrates in his book about the thinking of death in Schopenhauer, a death-contemplator.<sup>194</sup> The Japanese philosopher Tanabe Hajime, following Socrates, calls this death-contemplation “practicing death.”<sup>195</sup> Hajime offered an alternative to Martin Heidegger’s thinking of death in his later philosophy in which the attempt to make the self nothing turns into the affirmation of a new life: a dialectic of life-in-death and death-in-life.<sup>196</sup> Socrates, as we read in Plato’s *Phaedo*, had defined philosophy as *thanatos melete*, preparing for death.<sup>197</sup> The thinking of Nund Rishi is the death-practice of a death-contemplator. According to Rahi, the meaninglessness of the world (*gāsil sombru'm vāsil kyāt*: I gathered blades of grass/ Of what use was this life to me?) and the realization of its illusoriness and poisonousness gives Nund Rishi’s vision

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<sup>193</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam*, 93. Rahi gives the following two lines of the *shruk* in his essay, which varies slightly from the version quoted above: *Maut chui su'h tu' kotū tsalīze/ Kheli manzu' kadiy tsārith kunhe* (sic).

<sup>194</sup> R. Raj Singh, *Death, Contemplation and Schopenhauer* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 1.

<sup>195</sup> James W Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: an essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 175.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-76.

<sup>197</sup> R. Raj Singh, *Death, Contemplation and Schopenhauer*, x.

of reality and its capacity for truth-recognition a complete shape and final form.<sup>198</sup> This complete shape and form is arrived at in Nund Rishi's thinking of death. Rahi insists that there is hardly a Kashmiri poet who insists so uncompromisingly on the impermanence of the world and its finitude:

*Duniyahās āyey bāj bāj*  
*Sāmīth karo bāj baṭh*  
*Tse bronth gayi mol tu' māj*  
*Kātsāh gamets chay vānij vaṭh*<sup>199</sup>

We came into the world like two brothers  
 We thought we will share our burdens  
 Before you went your father and mother  
 Yet how hard your heart has become

Rahi also quotes a *shruk* which returns to the metaphor of shops at closing time, suggesting that these could be fragments of a longer poem:

*Larāh lazu'm manz mādānas*  
*Āndī āndī kārimas takiye tu' gath*  
*Lar rozi yatī tu' bu' gatshu' pānas*  
*Vān gatshi vānas phālav dith*<sup>200</sup>

I cast a residence in the middle of the earth  
 And around it I circumambulate and pay obeisance  
 This dwelling will be here and I shall leave  
 The way shops are abandoned at closing time

The building on earth around one circumambulates in reverence is left behind much in the same way that shopkeepers leave behind their shops at closing time. The extended version of the *shruk* that follows reveals that Nund Rishi turns to the thinking of death, and the impermanence of life, as the basis for a radical social critique:

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<sup>198</sup> Rahi translates *pazar bāsh*, which I have translated as truth-recognition, as sense of reality. Rahman Rahi, “*Shaikh al ‘Ālam sanz shā‘irānā ḥaṣiyath*,” 145.

<sup>199</sup> Rahman Rahi, “*Shaikh al ‘Ālam sanz shā‘irānā ḥaṣiyath*,” 146.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. I have corrected minor spelling inconsistencies in the last line from Rahi's text.

*Khānan handyen yiman robe khānan*  
*Jānan dapān apāri gatsh*  
*Sōndru' vuchmakh harvakh nāvan*  
*Tsamro sāt̄yen duvān latsh*  
*Tāth māli dīthu'm kapas bovan*  
*Naşru' mye vuch tu' tsu' vuchni gatsh*<sup>201</sup>

These intimidating residences of the rich  
 The moment they see you, they turn you away  
 I see beautiful women singing in those palaces  
 And dust being swept with chowries  
 The same residences are there no longer  
 People now grow cotton over there  
 I have seen all this, Nasr, you go and see.

This is a devastating critique of the Kashmiri elite, whose houses intimidate the poor and who turn the poor away the moment they cross the paths to their houses. Even as the beautiful young women in these houses sing melodious songs and dust is being swept off with chowries, it is the land under the same palaces that, in a different time, is used to grow cotton. The palaces are in ruins and are claimed for farming. Nund Rishi invites his disciple Baba Naşr al-Dīn, and the reader, to go and examine this for himself. Rahi has a mode of reading Nund Rishi in which he arrives at the meaning of the *shruk* by filling in the missing metaphors from the *shruk*. The meaning of the *shruk* cannot be properly understood unless one approaches it through this attention to what remains outside of it. This is a great difficulty in reading the *shruks*, which make their interpretation a difficult task. In this example, we see the *khāns* (the chiefs and the nobles) shoo away the poor. The women of these houses are beautiful and sing songs as dust is being swept off with chowries. But it is the same palace, that is in ruins with the passage of time, and people reclaim the land to grow cotton. Here death is not only a way of thinking of one's ends

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

but also becomes the basis of a radical social critique which pushes us to rethink political equality from the standpoint of our existence as temporal beings and the ruination of things, and beings, in history.

Let us now turn to another aspect of Nund Rishi's *shruks* Rahi brings up in his essay: the asceticism of the poet. As Rahi puts it, in Nund Rishi, it is not possible to be in the world and yet not of it.<sup>202</sup> Rahi suggests that asceticism is fundamental to Nund Rishi's life and thinking even though many recent revisionist accounts stress a final, and Islamic, repudiation of asceticism in Nund Rishi.<sup>203</sup> There are indeed *shruks* in Nund Rishi which are critical of extreme asceticism, but a closer reading of the *shruks* reveals that Nund Rishi also never really ceased to be critical of a forgetful immersion in life. This attitude is also not in contradiction with traditional Islamic and Sufi Pietism and resembles some forms of Hindu and Buddhist thought current in Kashmir around the time of the rise of the Rishi Order. The overall theme of Nund Rishi's *shruks* remains death, which he approaches through speaking of the impermanence of life. The impermanence of life is heightened in the following *shruk*, which Rahi compares, in its greatness, to the poetic experience of the classical Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869), that brings forth a frightful picture (*trahrāvan vol taṣvīr*) of the ruination of life and leaves you trembling:

*Ganbar prakat karān chum kāv*  
*Tīr chanyem anbar bāvu' kas*  
*Sar gom gur tu' wokhu'l gayam nāv*  
*Bor gom gob tu' trāvu' kas*<sup>204</sup>

The crow reveals a serious word that makes it shed

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>203</sup> See, for instance, Khaki Muhammad Farooq, *Mubaligh-e Islām: Hazrat Shaikh Nūriddīn Walī* (Srinagar: Siddiq Publications, 2012).

<sup>204</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣīyath," 150.

All its feathers which gather at its feet  
My horse has drowned and my boat has run aground  
The burden has become heavy  
I cannot even leave it for someone else

There are other variants of this *shruk*, but this is the one quoted by Kamil and Rahi. For Rahman Rahi, Ghalib is the epitome of poetic expression, and in comparing this *shruk* to Ghalib, Rahi offers us his understanding of poetic expression in Nund Rishi. Rahi writes:

Leaving aside the symbolic meaning to one side (and those symbols which are to be found in this *shruk*, there is a long tradition of such symbols in Kashmiri poetry), the secret situation which is sculpted in this *shruk* appears as frightening, unquiet and helpless. The crow reveals a profound word and the self sheds all its plumage, which collects at its feet in a heap. Such a serious and heavy word that my horse instead of trotting on land drowns in water and my boat instead of floating on the water has run aground.<sup>205</sup>

Rahi misses the metaphorical correspondence that the *shruk* sets up between the metaphor of the horse drowning in waters and the boat that runs aground. It is the horse which should have been on the ground and the boat which should have been on the waters but everything has been turned upside-down. This is a language of crisis and it persists through much of Nund Rishi's *shruks* except in certain places such as where he speaks of *Honz pāthyen lobmu's tār* (I crossed over like a royal swan). As we shall see in a subsequent Chapter, this language of crisis gathers momentum in Nund Rishi and reveals a vernacular apocalyptic.

I hinted at the beginning of the Chapter at a tension between mysticism and poetry in Rahi's interpretation of Nund Rishi. Rahi resolves this tension by not drawing a distinction between the experience of poetic creation and the experience of the mystic. He turns instead to the relation between Nund Rishi's poetic thinking and mysticism in medieval Kashmir:

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

Much like the creative use of language in its search for the meaning of experience needs fire of creative imagination, extremes of emotion and the miracle-working of art so does indeterminate thinking and vision need all of these things to give moving form and body to human situations. If these conditions are not there, even if the thoughts are deep and meaningful, they get paralysed. His personality was such a furnace in which a Prakritic overturning overwhelmed the old and modern springs of faith and thinking to give birth to that plural philosophy of which he himself was the greatest flag-bearer ('*Alamdār*). The stature of *Shaikh al-'Alam* as a thinker is serious and his poetry is its living evidence. Whenever this philosophy acquires the warmth of feeling in Shaikh's poetry and becomes the vibration of the pulse of his thought, idea becomes movement and movement takes the form of a play and acquires drama's design and grip.<sup>206</sup>

Rahi situates Nund Rishi's mystical poetry in the milieu of North Indian *bhaktī* revolts against classical Hinduism. The task for future readers of Nund Rishi is to approach the philosophy of Nund Rishi in a relation with not only histories of asceticism in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism in Kashmir, but also the thinking of such *bhaktī* and Sikh figures as Kabir and Guru Nanak; in other words, to try and make more explicit the relations between poetry, history, and truth in medieval South Asia. Rahi gives us an example of how poetry, history and truth may appear together in a knot in one of Nund Rishi's most powerful *shruks*:

*Duniyahkis tātis maṭis nāras*  
*Dīshith anāras qarim gath*  
*Shaitān laṣh lajīm petsi bāras*  
*Rāvam tsūras tāras vath*<sup>207</sup>

The mad fire of this world  
 I see a pomegranate  
 I circumambulate it in desire  
 The mound of dry grass catches fire  
 The thief loses even the path back home

This is not an easy *shruk* to understand, or translate, but Rahi teaches us one way of approaching the *shruk*. In a private interview, Rahi suggested that he himself remains

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 151-52.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 152.

surprised how he arrived at what is clearly a masterly act of interpretation.<sup>208</sup> Let us turn to Rahi's interpretation of the *shruk* in which Rahi illustrates what he means by the hidden drama of ideas in Nund Rishi's poetry:

A whole dramatic situation hides in this *shruk* as a simile. In Kashmir, in autumn, in the season of the pomegranates, the children slip away to orchards in order to steal the fruit. Consider for a moment such a child who, without giving anyone even as much as a hint, leaves his home late in the evening and crosses a small stream to an orchard. He imagines the ripe, juicy pomegranates at the tip of the tree branches and many pleasurable ember-colors take flight in his heart. He is full of desire, overly exuberant and circumambulates the tree. An accident takes place just as he moves a mound of dry grass right under the tree so that he can climb it and reach out to the farthest tips of the highest branches for the juiciest pomegranates. As soon as he lifts the mound of grass, it suddenly catches fire. As the flames spread, the watchman and the neighbouring residents raise a hue and cry. The child gets nervous and runs. But because of fear, he cannot even find the boat which he used to cross the stream and his return is blocked by a fast-flowing stream. On the riverbank: the child's remorseful desperation and fear of punishment.<sup>209</sup>

The desire for pomegranates meets the confusion of a self suddenly abandoned by life to face up to a calling of accounts. The fate of human beings in the world is no different from the child in the *shruk* who is remorseful in the end and helpless before a final crossing. But even in this *shruk*, the encounter with a final reckoning is a moment of decision. Death is always with you but it sometimes rushes towards you like a fast-flowing stream. Rahi, however, moves to a unity, which even though hinted at in Nund Rishi himself, is in the end lacking in the complex play of the *shruks*. Rahi writes:

We get a proper sense of the potentiality of creative imagination when because of it consciousness crosses its limits to acquire impressions of different things in a way that despite being dissimilar in appearance, form, effect and manner are at their root a unity. This act matches the capacity and creation of modern painting. Its foundation is simile and wonder. The melting, the halting, arresting, pleasing pictures and collage created in the river of consciousness, you can discern all this here. This is the process because of which, according to Ghalib, the sleeping path awakens with the laughter of flowers and the becoming of trees and animals which take flight in the air of poetry.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Personal interview with Rahman Rahi in May 2013.

<sup>209</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath," 152.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 154.

The way Rahi struggles with the nearness and distance between mysticism and poetry is at its most obvious in this passage where he explicitly compares Nund Rishi with the Urdu poet, Ghalib. As we know, Rahi is a scholar of Persian poetry, where this relation between mysticism and poetry receives an explicit formulation and development. But Rahi writes that Nund Rishi's poetry does not have the warmth and flight of Ghalib's poetry but it does come close.<sup>211</sup> Even though there isn't the warmth or the flight of Ghalib in the Shaikh *shruks* but it is not as if Shaikh's poetry is totally bereft of it. Rahi struggles to keep the highest place for poetry but without abandoning Shaikh al-'Ālam's mysticism. Rahi then traces a different path to understanding Nund Rishi's poetic thinking:

The singularity of poetry, its magical potentiality, its fabulous experience, are the essence of those known and unknown elements which together in one usage, we call form, style, or color and it is because of this it becomes easy to recognize the separate and unique voice of the poetic persona. The linguistic matrix matters as much as the elements of form, or the poet's search for meaning or theme; and additionally there is another element of form called syntax where the differences of sound, tone, pitch and accent come into consideration. These elements of poetry, in their different colors and forms, differentiate one poet's sense of reality (*pazar bāsh*) from another poet's sense of reality. Hazrat Shaikh, in his best moments, brings all these elements into play in his poetry. This is how Nund Rishi establishes the singularity of his poetic Saying and the peculiarity of his expression.<sup>212</sup>

We yet again encounter Rahi fail to elaborate on what he perceives to be the singularity of Nund Rishi's poetry. The only argument Rahi has in the end is that Nund Rishi's poetry also reveals the use of those elements of poetry that were the subject of much reflection in the formalist school of New Criticism in the history of English literary criticism. The poetry of Nund Rishi is approached by Rahman Rahi in his close readings as a flawed but equally self-contained aesthetic object as the

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 159.

Urdu poetry of Mirza Ghalib. There is hardly a better example from the *shruks* than the one Rahi quotes to illustrate this:

*Hāras nyendu'r payam yāmath poh gom*  
*Kāras dōh ām nu' granz akh*  
*Teli pyom tseytas yeli vōthun kōh gom*  
*Pata'e ām yāmun tu' dopnam pakh*

In summer I went to sleep until it was winter  
Not a single day of work I put in  
I remembered only then when action became as difficult  
As moving a mountain  
The *Yama* came then and said to me: Come!

Rahi cites this *shruk* for its sheer formal brilliance: the *shruk* maps a journey through life where the work of self-transformation never begins because of neglect until it is too late and one is surprised by death. Rahi points out how the opposition between *hār* (summer) and *poh* (winter) in the first line and the stress at the end of the line on the word *akh* (one) deepens our sense of the loss of time.<sup>213</sup> But the pace of crisis, anticipation of death, is quickened in the metre of the second and the last line of the *shruk*.<sup>214</sup> Rahi is effusive about the role he assigns to the *shruk* as a form in the history of Kashmiri language:

If we have to say that the Kashmiri language is a gift of the Hazrat-e Shaikh, we can simply say that the *shruks* have brought to life the capacity of expression of the Kashmiri language (*bāwach bitur*), its inner life (*andirī zuv*), hidden jewels (*kupith jauhar*) and its capacity to bring forth newness (*prethan bal*).<sup>215</sup>

Rahi also turns to the thinking of death in Nund Rishi in another essay from the same volume, *Lal Dyed tu' Shaikh al-'Ālam: Akh sarsarī taqobulī muṭālu'* (Lal Ded and Shaikh al-'Ālam: A Comparative Study), where he offers us a comparative reading of Lal

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 159-60.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 164.

Ded and Nund Rishi. The question of death is one way of approaching a distinction between the thinking of these two saint-poets. We find two distinct ways of thinking death at the beginnings of Kashmiri literary culture which has serious consequences for the trajectory of Kashmiri thought. The beginnings of Kashmiri literary culture in the fourteenth century have come down to us in the form of the memory of a relation: the relation of Nund Rishi to Lal Ded. In this later essay, Rahi suggests that Nund Rishi's poetry is imbued with a deep sense of the impermanence of the world: "The impermanence of the world and the inevitability of death, the fierce and deep realization of this, which is found in different places in Shaikh *shruks*, appears as the life and ornament of his poetry."<sup>216</sup> But this sense of impermanence of the world is also bound up with a certain dread. Rahi begins this essay on Nund Rishi and Lal Ded by sketching out the problems of a comparative reading:

To compare the poetry of Lal Ded and Shaikh al-'Ālam, by all means, remains a difficult task. This is first of all because even after about six hundred years, no basic research has been done on their poetry, which means that there is still much verse about which it is not evident in a reliable and clear way, if it is Shaikh's verse or Lal Ded's verse. The second problem is that so much of their oeuvre is recorded in different manuscripts and books and with different diacritical marks. The third reason is that many researchers are still not satisfied that all of the work of these two saint-poets (especially Shaikh al-'Ālam) has become available because new *vākhs* and *shruks* emerge every now and then. It is obvious then that any opinion under the circumstances about these poets of early Kashmiri would be tentative. The other difficulty for a comparative analysis of these two poets is that they have been very close to each other in certain fundamental beliefs and traces and for hundreds of years their verse has moved in history so close to each other that, much like folk poetry, it has most likely been revised to reflect a shared affective life. Quite apart from it, the other difficulty is that more than being poets, both of them have been great spiritual leaders of their time.<sup>217</sup>

But yet there is no real explanation that we find about why the two poets have moved so closely together in history that it is hard to ascribe authorship to certain *vākhs* and *shruks*.

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<sup>216</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Lal Dyed tu' Shaikh al-'Ālam: Akh sarsarī taqobulī muṭālu'," in *Kahvat: Tanqīdī mazmūnan hañz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 128.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

Rahi returns to the question of the difference between mysticism and poetry by arguing that a high spiritual status does not necessarily confer great poetic skill:

Just as it is not necessary that a Prophet must be a poet, much in the same way it is possible that someone may have acquired great status in the spiritual world but would not be able to express himself or herself in poetry and even if he or she turns to poetry, the expression is not very good. Or it can even be so that sometimes he or she brings forth good verse and sometimes struggles to even find the appropriate words.<sup>218</sup>

We are now familiar with this tension in Rahi's reading of Nund Rishi. The question for Rahi is to make sense of the unevenness in the aesthetic quality of Nund Rishi's mystical verse. This could be Rahi's assessment of Nund Rishi: "...sometimes he or she brings forth good verse and sometimes struggles to even find the appropriate words."<sup>219</sup> Rahi proposes that a comparative analysis between Nund Rishi and Lal Ded should be accomplished by thinking through the ways in which these two poets express a feeling or experience and then turn to the truth of that feeling and experience in itself and in closer attention to the color of their expressions.<sup>220</sup> Rahi chooses a *vākh* and a *shruk* about which there is little doubt that one is largely attributed to Lal Ded and the other to Shaikh al-'Alam. Both seem to be expressing a crisis but do so in a different and unique way. Let us take a look at the *vākh* and the *shruk* quoted by Rahi (we have already encountered the *shruk* earlier in this Chapter):

Lal Ded:

*Nābadī bāras atu' gand dyol gom*  
*Deh kād hol gom h̄yeke kaheo*  
*Ḡoru' sund vanun rāvan tyol pyom*  
*Pahli ros khyol gom h̄yeke kaheo*<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 122.



cannot pass on to anyone else. Or, in other words, this burden is his own burden. That means even if he could pass it on to someone else, he would do so. But he cannot do so. His helplessness is in this that he alone must carry this burden. We come across a tragic situation in one and in the other a world of helplessness. One illuminates the human situation more than the other and as such may appear to be more close and appealing to us as readers.<sup>224</sup>

We see Rahi privilege Lal Ded's poetry as being more near to the human situation. This human situation for Rahi has the form of a conflict in Lal Ded. Rahi writes: "In Lal Ded, often instead of a mere inner conflict, a struggle emerges. A struggle to bring a difficulty in control, a struggle to attain a purpose, a life-to-death struggle to find a Beloved."<sup>225</sup>

Rahi gives us more examples:

*Āmi panu' sodras nāvi chas lamān*  
*Kati bozi da'e myon myeti di tār*<sup>226</sup> (Lal Ded)

Look at me:  
towing a boat over vast waters with such slender sewing-thread  
Where will my shining one hear me?  
If only he would ferry  
even me.<sup>227</sup>

Shaikh al-'Ālam says:

*Dū'this kalkī kālas manzu'*  
*Honz pāthyen lobmu's tār* (Shaikh al-'Ālam)<sup>228</sup>

In this dark age  
I crossed over to the other side like a royal swan

Rahi further draws on the distinction between Lal Ded and Nund Rishi by turning to the singularity of Lal Ded:

Lalla holds her heart between her hands because of this inner struggle and subjects our love and loss to torture. The destining and the height in Hazrat Shaikh, his spiritual greatness and

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 122-23.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> This translation is by Sonam Kachru. Sonam Kachru, "The Words of Lalla: Voices of the Everyday Wild": translation and commentary," in *Spolia Magazine, The Medieval Issue, No. 5*, October, 2013.

<sup>228</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Lal D̄yed tau' Shaikh al-'Ālam: Akh sarsarī taqobulī muṭālu'," 124.

stature, reduces us to respect. The inner strife in Lal Ded and her struggle does not become the reason for her involvement in any idea or experience, and that's why in her poetry in different places there is a constant flare of feelings and the revolutions of emotion intensify and confer on her ideas and thinking, doubts and prayers (*sharan tu' dāyan*), faith and beliefs (*yatshen tu' patshen*), her words and Sayings (*lafzan tu' kathan*), the form of great poetry.<sup>229</sup>

Rahi suggests that Nund Rishi's address is on the borders of *khitāb* (lecture, preaching)<sup>230</sup>: "Even then the truth is that compared to Lalla *vākh*, in Shaikh *shruk* there is more preaching than dialogue with the self; and because of the heat of ownness (*pannyār*) we see in Lal Ded, we miss its lack in the poetry of Shaikh al-Ālam."<sup>231</sup> Rahi also speaks of some other critical differences between Lal Ded and Nund Rishi:

Lal reveals more of the stages of her spiritual journey and the distance and turns that separate the human from the divine and in those stages expresses her states and reveals the unity of the parts and the whole.

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Contrary to this, Hazrat Shaikh is deeply anxious about the weaknesses and faults of the human and appears to be trembling in the fear of death and this is true that in this affair no Kashmiri poet can measure up to Shaikh al-Ālam.<sup>232</sup>

Rahi turns to an essay of the Kashmiri literary critic Shafi Shauq who also draws a distinction between Lal Ded and Nund Rishi from their standpoint on the question of death:

Shafi Shauq is right that the fear of death is there much more in Shaikh al-Ālam than Lal Ded, but it would not be correct perhaps to go as far as saying that Shaikh al-Ālam favors self-mortification to the degree of masochism. In the first place, Hazrat Shaikh's poetry is as free and pure of the sexual pleasure associated with masochism as Lal Ded's *kalām*. The practice which Shauq *Ṣāb* calls giving pain to the self is a way of controlling the *nafs*, the seat of the self, which is the same action which Lal Ded calls killing *lobh*, *manmath*, *madd* etc.<sup>233</sup>

Rahi refuses to concede Shafi Shauq's point that for Nund Rishi there is just one path to salvation and that is to turn one's back to the world. Rahi writes: "The truth is that, much like Lal Ded, Hazrat Shaikh too believes that one can attain to a spiritual truth while

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 124-25.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 126-7.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 129.

being in the world and he too is a believer in *Yemi yeti vov tām tati lūnū* (The one who sows shall reap).<sup>234</sup> The fear of death in Nund Rishi appears, according to Rahi, even to approach a form of necrophobia, but nevertheless this still does not justify calling Shaikh al-‘Ālam’s death dangerous and Lal Ded’s death pleasing.<sup>235</sup> Rahi quotes a verse where Shaikh al-‘Ālam appears close to the thinking of death in Lal Ded:

*Yādas taḥndis dōh d̄yen b̄arizi*  
*Zindu’ āsith m̄arizi nu’ zanh*

Remembering Him you should spend your day and night  
 If you live so, you’ll never die.

For Rahi, the inconsistency in Nund Rishi’s thinking of death poses the question of its aesthetic judgement. But he never considers the possibility that such internal inconsistency is constitutive of Nund Rishi’s discourse. Some of the reflections of Rahi on Nund Rishi appear excessive as Rahi teaches a mode of reading in which creative imagination must enter the poet’s experience to search through a common archive of loss.

Rahi hints that the insistence on death in Nund Rishi may even be a spiritual strategy:

The other point is that in stressing on death so much, the purpose of *Hazrat-e Shaikh* [Nund Rishi] is not only to prepare a human being for death but also to make him or her realize that if the end of this life is ashes and dust then why this clamour of ‘what should I do! what should I do!’ and the hubris, hatred and violence.<sup>236</sup>

Here Rahi barely touches upon the political implications of Nund Rishi’s mystical poetry.

Rahi’s final word about the difference between Nund Rishi and Lal Ded’s poetic thinking is this:

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 132.

If Lal roasts our heart on the fire of love, Shaikh does nothing less than move a mountain. Lal searches for herself in the fields of Nothingness. But Lal turns to the inside from the outside. The Shaikh leaves behind the world and takes to the forest.<sup>237</sup>

What Rahi misses in his reading of Nund Rishi is that this retreat to the forest aims at precisely nothing less than an overturning of the world. It is in the end in their thinking of the world (and, as such, their thinking of death) that differences appear between Lal Ded and Nund Rishi's poetic and political thinking.

Let us turn now to the thinking of death in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* to make sense of what appears peculiar and strange to Rahman Rahi about Nund Rishi's thinking of death. Nund Rishi's meditations on death can be approached in a way that is not entirely dissimilar from Heidegger's thinking of death in his *Being and Time*. For both Nund Rishi and Heidegger, the question of death appears in relation to the possibility of an authentic existence in which we are not in the fallenness of the they-self, in Heideggerian terms, or a state of forgetfulness, in Nund Rishi's terms. Heidegger develops his thinking of death between sections 46 and 53 of *Being and Time* (and here I would restrict myself to Heidegger's thinking of death in *Being and Time*). The question that turns us to the thinking of death is always the possibility of our own death. Nund Rishi repeatedly bring us up against this possibility in his *shruks*. The *shruks* bring our death into sharp focus by putting our lives and their meaning into question. The face-to-face encounter that Nund Rishi sets up with death reveals the ideal reader of Nund Rishi to be someone who is contemplating his or her own death. We should first of all eliminate any misunderstanding that may arise from the fact that Nund Rishi often also speaks of a life-beyond-death. Heidegger, as we know, refuses to address the question of

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

a life-beyond-death: “As long as I have not asked about Dasein in its structure and as long as I have not defined death in what it is, I cannot even rightly ask what would come after Dasein in connection with its death.”<sup>238</sup> We would here elide the differences between Heidegger’s Dasein and Nund Rishi’s poetic subject. But there is a clear sense in the *shruks* of coming up against what Heidegger calls the possibility of the absolute impossibility of existence.<sup>239</sup> Death is not demise for Heidegger – the actual physical event of death – but mortality as our essential possibility as human beings.<sup>240</sup> My death is my ownmost possibility: this ownmost possibility is the difficult burden Nund Rishi speaks of which cannot be passed on to someone else. We are now beginning to see the limitations of Rahi’s criticism that, being crushed by death, Nund Rishi turns away from the strife of the human situation. Rather the human situation appears even more clearly at stake in Nund Rishi’s thinking of death. But this clearly takes place in an eschatological register which shares much in common with Heidegger’s eschatology, which counterposes the certainty of death to the Cartesian “I think, therefore I am!”: “This certainty, that ‘I myself am in that I will die,’ is *the basic certainty of Dasein itself.*”<sup>241</sup> Nund Rishi turns to this ‘certainty’ of existence in the following *shruk*:

*Sarphas tsālize astas khandas*  
*Su’has tsālize kruhas tām*  
*Dīndāras tsālize vaharas khandas*  
*Lānis tsālize nu’ achi muhas tām*

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<sup>238</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, translated by T. Kisiel (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985), 314. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 292.

<sup>239</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 294.

<sup>240</sup> Richard Polt, *Heidegger: an introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 86-87.

<sup>241</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, 316-317. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 300-2.

You can run away from the snake to an arm's length  
You can run away from a lion for a few miles  
You can run away from a man of faith for a year  
You cannot even escape death by the distance of an eyelash.<sup>242</sup>

This facing up to death at stake in Nund Rishi is the very possibility of an authentic existence for Heidegger. Richard Polt is right in pointing out that “facing up” to death is perhaps a better word than “anticipation” for an authentic response (Heidegger’s word *vorlaufen* literally means “running forwards”) to death. This discloses the mood of anxiety and anticipation in *shruks* such as *Ganbar prakat karān chum kāv*. The mood of anxiety brings us face-to-face with our finitude. But this facing up to mortality appears as bound up with owning up to responsibility for one’s own actions. As Nund Rishi puts it in a refrain from a longer poem: *Yus kari gongal su’e kariy krāv* (Only the one who sows shall reap). It is to this situation of choosing one’s choosing that Nund Rishi’s *shruks* push us by holding out our self to its mortality. Nund Rishi is critical of the lack of resoluteness in choosing an authentic possibility for the self which takes into account our mortality: *Kyāh kare kyāh kare tsoliy nu’ zanh* (You could never rid yourself of this ‘What shall I do? What must I do?’). The legends about Nund Rishi in the different hagiographies speak of his failure at different human skills before he retreats to the forest: his brothers initiate him into thieving but he disappoints them, and then he also he loses his apprenticeship with a weaver because of his abstract ruminations about weaving at work.

Negative theology often takes the form of a powerful discourse on death.<sup>243</sup>

Resolutely facing up to one’s mortality involves existing in the face of death. This

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<sup>242</sup> B N Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1984), 314.

Heideggerian insight resolves the seeming contradiction between Nund Rishi's dismissal of death as inconsequential and the fear and trembling to which the thinking of death reduces him (and which was a matter of unease for both Rahman Rahi and Shafi Shauq). This is why there is no danger of the Sufi (and the Kashmiri) tradition interpreting Nund Rishi's call to "die before you die" as an invitation to suicide. Nund Rishi calls death the "sweet drink" which "heals." His thinking of death is not a morbid obsession, as claimed by Shafi Shauq, but a healing that begins with the owning up to responsibility for one's death.<sup>244</sup> There is yet another question which we need to address: does immortality appear as a solution to the problem of death in Nund Rishi? There are clearly *shruks* that speak of immortality, but it seems clear that what is more immediately at stake is life as a practice of death.

Let us now turn in more detail to Heidegger's thinking of death in *Being and Time*. Heidegger begins Division II of *Being and Time* by recapitulating that the structure of Dasein (a 'concept' for the being of human beings) reveals itself as a structure of care. Heidegger reveals how existence formally indicates that "Dasein *is* as an understanding potentiality-for-being, which, in its Being, makes an issue of that Being itself."<sup>245</sup> In Section 46, Heidegger writes that the structure of care tells us that "in Dasein there is always something *still outstanding*, which, as a potentiality-for-Being for Dasein itself, has not yet become 'actual.'"<sup>246</sup> Heidegger arrives at his existential concept of death in

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<sup>243</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Post-Scriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices," in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 291.

<sup>244</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Lal D̄yed tau' Shaikh al-'Ālam: Akh sarsarī taqobulī muṭālu'," 130-131.

<sup>245</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 274.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

the question of the ontological wholeness of Dasein. This coheres with Nund Rishi where death takes up the form of a necessary potentiality.

The death of others is always accessible to us and this also makes possible an ontological analysis. It is this death of the other Nund Rishi uses to stage an existential encounter. Heidegger approaches this phenomenon in Section 47: “In the dying of the Other we can experience that remarkable phenomenon of Being which may be defined as the change-over of an entity from Dasein’s kind of Being (or life) to no-longer-Dasein.”<sup>247</sup> Nund Rishi brings this transition from being to the nothingness of death into sharp focus through images and metaphors which produce a shock in the reader. There is no way of experiencing this dying of others except in an objective sense. That is a problem with this idea of death and clearly something which Nund Rishi strives against in his own move from the death of the others to an existential concept of death. For, as Heidegger puts it, “death is in every case mine [death is always essentially my own: the Stambaugh translation]”<sup>248</sup> We must move beyond dying as the death of others to this existential concept of death.<sup>249</sup> There is in Nund Rishi an Islamic concept of death as a state of difficult transition from one mode of being to the other which is mediated by the question of our responsibility for the life we live in relation to the revealed Law. But against this background, Nund Rishi pushes for an existential concept of death to mark the necessity for the beginning of an ascetic self-transformation which not only opens the human to its potentiality but also to truth.

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 284. For the Stambaugh translation, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 240.

<sup>249</sup> In Section 49, Heidegger lets the term dying “stand for that *way of Being* in which Dasein *is towards* its death.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 291.

Our analysis of death remains this-worldly. As Heidegger puts it: “But our analysis of death remains purely ‘this-worldly’ in so far that it interprets that phenomenon merely in the way in which it *enters into* any particular Dasein as a possibility of its Being.”<sup>250</sup> As Heidegger puts it:

Death is not something not yet present-at-hand, nor is it that which is ultimately still outstanding but which has been reduced to a minimum. *Death is something that stands before us—something impending [an imminence: Stambaugh translation].*<sup>251</sup>

Death is, for Heidegger, *distinctively* impending [or, an eminent imminence: Stambaugh translation].<sup>252</sup> It is this idea of death as an *eminent imminence* which is at stake in Nund Rishi’s thinking of death. But in Nund Rishi it is not an analysis which is this-worldly but comes wrapped in the mystical shell of a revealed religion.

The reason Rahman Rahi turns to the Urdu poet Ghalib in speaking of Nund Rishi is the mood of angst, or dread, in relation to death in both the poets. As Ghalib puts it in a couplet from one of his famous *ghazals*:

*Maut kā ek din mu ‘ayan hai*  
*Nīnd kyūn rāt bhar nahin āī*

A day is fixed for my death  
Why don’t I then get sleep at night?

This anxiety about death is not to be confused with fear. As Heidegger puts it: “Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one’s demise. This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of ‘weakness’ in some individual, but as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>252</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 241.

exists as thrown Being *towards* its end.”<sup>253</sup> This is the sense in which Ghalib speaks of death and this is the death we encounter in Nund Rishi. But in structures of everydayness, death appears as the idle talk about “one dies.” This we can call our ordinary understanding of death. It is this evasion of death in everyday life that is the subject of much of Nund Rishi’s poetic thinking. It is the bustle of the bazaar in the day where one feels abandoned at night. It is the buoyancy of the youth on which rain the arrows of death. But it is not as if everydayness evades death completely. As Heidegger puts it: “Everydayness confines itself to conceding the ‘certainty’ of death in this ambiguous manner just in order to weaken that certainty by covering up dying still more and to alleviate its own thrownness into death.”<sup>254</sup> Nund Rishi excavates this death in everydayness by speaking of it as a shop at closing time. Heidegger calls it a certainty of death which nonetheless is inappropriate.<sup>255</sup> That’s why the risk in reading Nund Rishi is to reduce his thinking of death as merely revealing the certainty of death. We encounter this idea of death in the reception of Nund Rishi’s thinking of death as ‘idle talk’ about death (for instance, in those countless religious exegeses of his mystical poetry which are published every year by different Islamic presses in Srinagar). But Nund Rishi in his *shruks* about death uncovers the inappropriate covering up of death in everydayness. We must recall here the legend from Nund Rishi’s hagiographies of when his wife visits him in the forest and implores him to return home. But when Nund Rishi refuses, she

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 295. Heidegger calls this experience of being thrown into the world which matters to us ‘thrownness.’

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 299-300.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 301.

abandons her two children outside his cave— both of whom are later found dead.<sup>256</sup> This is a moment of scandal in Nund Rishi’s biography, and he is about to be arrested for this crime. But the police chief who comes to arrest him is converted by Nund Rishi in a single glance.<sup>257</sup> One way of reading this legend is the way it reveals Nund Rishi’s unsettling of the traditional thinking of death. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger poses the possibility of an authentic being-toward-death which he then makes explicit in Section 53, where he proposes the project of an existing being-toward-death (emphases in the original): “...*anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned **freedom towards death**—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the “they”, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious.*”<sup>258</sup> Nund Rishi’s *shruks* about death do not then disclose a morbid obsession with death (‘masochism’ in Shafi Shauq’s reading) but a freedom towards death beyond the illusions of all idle talk about it. The *bhaktī* poet Kabir celebrates this moment of reversal in relation to one’s attitude to death in these words: “Kabir, death that the world is afraid of, brings me joy/Supreme bliss one attains only upon dying.”<sup>259</sup> The existential idea of death in Nund Rishi also helps clarify the contradiction between the impossibility of death and its imminence in Nund Rishi’s *shruks*, where Nund Rishi can at the same time say *Kyāh tagi motas* (what can death achieve?) and *Lānis tsalize nu*’

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<sup>256</sup> G N Gauhar, *Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali (Nund Rishi)* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 26.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 311.

<sup>259</sup> Cited in R. Raj Singh, *Death, Contemplation and Schopenhauer* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 1. Charlotte Vaudeville in her 1974 study of Kabir concludes: “Death, its inescapable, frightful, tragic character, appears to be at the core of Kabir’s thought.” Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 147-148.

*achi muhas tām* (You cannot even escape death by the distance of an eyelash). Dasein's demise is not a perishing. Nund Rishi's *Kyāh tagi motas* recalls the words of the New Testament: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"<sup>260</sup> Nund Rishi keeps calling to "*Marnas bronth mar bā*" (die before you die) and keeps reminding his readers "*Marith martabu' peyi* (Only in losing yourself to death will you find yourself).

What does it mean to "die before you die"? Derrida, following Socrates, connects it to nothing less than the task of philosophy: "The *Phaedo* explicitly names philosophy: it is the attentive anticipation of death, the care brought to bear upon dying, the meditation on the best way to receive, give, or give oneself death, the experience of a vigil over the possibility of death, and over the possibility of death as impossibility."<sup>261</sup> As Socrates puts it himself: "...those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead."<sup>262</sup> Jean Birnbaum in his Introduction to one of the last interviews with Jacques Derrida before his death reminds us of what Derrida wrote about learning to live in his *Spectres of Marx*:

To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death.<sup>263</sup>

In the same interview, Derrida elaborates upon the same theme: "Learning to live should mean learning to die, learning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality (that is, without salvation, resurrection or redemption—neither for oneself nor for the

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<sup>260</sup> Françoise Dastur, *Death: An Essay on Finitude* (London: Athlone, 1996), 14.

<sup>261</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>262</sup> Plato, "Phaedo," in Plato, *Euthyphro Apology Crito Phaedo Phaedrus*, translated by Harold North Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 223.

<sup>263</sup> Jean Birnbaum, "Introduction," in *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, translated by Pascale Anne-Brault and Michael Naas (Hoboken, New Jersey: Melville House Publishing, 2007), 14.

other...to philosophize is to learn to die.”<sup>264</sup> Derrida could be summing up Nund Rishi’s thinking of death, except that Nund Rishi’s *shruks* also turn to the more traditional themes of Islamic eschatology. The philosophizing in Nund Rishi takes place against the background of the themes of salvation, resurrection, and redemption. But it is those *shruks* by Nund Rishi that remain popular that reveal the mood of anxiety in relation to death. It is this mood in which the early Islamic revelation also grounds its address to the new community of Meccan believers in the early years of Islam (610-622 CE).

Annemarie Schimmel, the scholar of Islam, reminds us that death is the gateway to life for the Sufis. In Islamic poetry, the eternal life opened up by death is likened to a spring.<sup>265</sup> But there is also perhaps another way of approaching the persistence of the themes of salvation, redemption and resurrection in Nund Rishi.

Emmanuel Levinas, in his lecture course on the theme of death, called *God, Death, and Time* approaches death as the patience of time.<sup>266</sup> But the waiting Levinas insists on, and Derrida affirms, is not the same thing as Heidegger’s being-towards-death.<sup>267</sup> Is the threat to my being the only source of my affect in relation to death? This is the question that Levinas poses *contra* Heidegger. What is at stake for Levinas is what he calls the reverse dogmatism of reducing death to the ontological dilemma of being or nothingness (as opposed to the positive dogmatism of immortality, or life-beyond-death). The Islamic positive dogma is the background to Nund Rishi’s *shruks*. For Levinas, death is ‘no

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<sup>264</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, translated by Pascale Anne-Brault and Michael Naas (Hoboken, New Jersey: Melville House Publishing, 2007), 24.

<sup>265</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, “Death as the Gateway to Life in the Eyes of the Sufis,” in *Reza Ali Khazeni Memorial Lectures in Iranian Studies Volume 2: Crafting the Intangible: Persian Literature and Mysticism*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2013), 48.

<sup>266</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

response' and as such is bound up with the other. Death is also a departure, a departure without return, without a forwarding address.<sup>268</sup> It is from the death of the other, which as we have seen was found inadequate for an existential concept of death by Heidegger, that Levinas begins his thinking of death. Levinas writes: "The experience of death that is not mine is an 'experience' of the death of *someone*, someone who from the outset is beyond biological processes, who is associated with me as someone."<sup>269</sup> We have already considered how Nund Rishi speaks of the impotence of death in *Kyāh tagi motas* (What can death achieve?) but he also alludes to its healing power in *Margu'c sharbath canu' ros nu' bālze* (Death is a sweet drink without which you shall not heal). Levinas writes: "Death is at once healing and impotence; an ambiguity that perhaps indicates an other dimension of meaning than that in which death is thought within the alternative to be/not-to-be. The ambiguity: an enigma."<sup>270</sup> Death is, for Levinas, its ex-ception: "It is an emotion, a movement, a disquietitude within the unknown."<sup>271</sup> Death remains an enigma, but its non-knowledge nevertheless is not the absence of a relationship.<sup>272</sup> For Levinas, it is through a relationship with death that Dasein in Heidegger will be a whole.<sup>273</sup> Levinas makes it clear that, for Heidegger, death as the end of being-in-the-world can be taken up "in the form of courage and not as pure passivity."<sup>274</sup> Levinas suggests that what was fascinating for Heidegger in death was "the possibility he finds in it of thinking

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 57.

nothingness.”<sup>275</sup> Levinas then turns to Kant and speaks of a rational hope that has a temporality different from being-to-death and this hope is a relationship:

It is as if, in the human dimension, and behind the *Sein zum Tode* [being-toward-death], an intrigue were woven of hope for immortality that was not measured by the length of time or by perpetuity, and which consequently had in this always [*toujours*] a temporality *other* than that of being-to-death. This intrigue is called “hope,” without having the usual sense of the term, which signifies an awaiting in time. It is a hope that resists every knowledge [*connaissance*], every gnosis. A relationship relative to which time and death have another meaning.<sup>276</sup>

We will see that this hope emerges in the Nund Rishi corpus as a repetition of Islamic eschatology. But it is nonetheless the existential encounter with death, which I read here in relation to Heidegger’s thinking of death, which is most striking about Nund Rishi’s mystical poetry. It is here that poetry meets philosophy in Nund Rishi and it is this moment which Rahman Rahi struggles to theorize from within the space of literary criticism.

For Levinas, it is not merely the question of a thinking of death but a proper response to death which is also a responsibility. In the end, Levinas turns to a different thinking of hope in Ernst Bloch: “For Bloch, it is not death that opens the authentic future; on the contrary, it is in the authentic future that death must be understood.”<sup>277</sup> This is the hope of realizing the not yet. This is the hope of a subject who is separated from the site where he would be able to be himself. It is this authentic future that Nund Rishi’s thinking of death struggles to push open. The possibility of authentic existence revealed in being-towards-death appears in Levinas as passivity, waiting and the melancholy of hope. This is clearly a Judeo-Christian-Islamic hope and resonates with many other

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 99.

themes in Nund Rishi's poetry. But the stakes of this authentic future in Nund Rishi are also this-worldly. For Levinas, it is not anxiety but the melancholy of turning away from responsibility, of unfulfillment, which opens out before Dasein its possibility. For instance, Levinas reads concerns about leaving one's work unfinished (a recurrent theme in Nund Rishi) as the real meaning of the fear of dying:

There is failure in every life, and the melancholy of this failure is its way of abiding in unfinished being. This is a melancholy that does not derive from anxiety. On the contrary, the anxiety of death would be a mode of this melancholy of the unfulfilled (which is not a wounding of one's pride). The fear of dying is the fear of leaving a work unfinished, and thus of not having lived.<sup>278</sup>

We might recall the *shruk* where Nund Rishi obsesses about not even having put in a single day of work: *Kāras dōh ām nu' granz akh* (Not a single day of work I put in!). The question that remains: what is one's work?

In everydayness, one doesn't lose the certainty of one's death but the certainty of death's imminence. If Rahi calls death as the fundamental theme of Nund Rishi's mystical poetry, it is death's imminence (or following Heidegger, death's eminent imminence) which I consider to be at the heart of Nund Rishi's reflections on death. It is because of the covering up of the imminence of death, or its displacement in a relation to the death of the other, that one may enter into either a calculus of death or an interminable mourning/awaiting. The *shruks* on death unravel this covering up of the imminence of death or its displacement in relation to the death of the other. There are, however, some *shruks* in which Nund Rishi approaches death either in relation to the death of the other or to an Islamic being-beyond-death.

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 100.

Let us now turn our attention to the resemblances between Judaeo-Christian-Islamic themes of death as we encounter these in Nund Rishi and Heidegger's existential concept of death. What is at stake in the resemblance between 'existentials' in Nund Rishi and Heidegger is not merely that Heidegger is repeating themes of Christianity at the ontological level or Nund Rishi is doing much the same with Islamic themes but that both Christianity and Islam have at their foundation an existential phenomenon. One could then go as far as say that not only is Nund Rishi uncovering an existential idea of death in everydayness but that he is also uncovering the existential phenomenon at the heart of Islam (more so in the moments where he repeats Qur'anic thinking of death). But Nund Rishi does so with an explicit political intent at a time of deepening relations between Islam and political power in medieval Kashmir.

It is perhaps not out of place to then end this Chapter with that other theme connected to anxiety and which Rahman Rahi invokes towards the end of his essay: humor. Nund Rishi's humor is rare in Kashmiri poetry and neither Lal Ded nor any other mystical poet in Kashmiri can equal Nund Rishi in this respect. But even this may not be as distant from the theme of death as it first appears: Françoise Dastur writes that "we *explode* into laughter only when, as in anxiety, there is no ground to stand on, when nothing fixed remains, and when in this state of suspense we find ourselves liberated from the burdens and attachments of daily life, and released into that more than human lightness by which existence as burden is transformed into grace."<sup>279</sup> It is these possibilities for a vital and fulfilled life that are, in the end, also at stake in Nund Rishi's thinking of Death. For instance, the subject of humor in Nund Rishi's poetry is often the

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<sup>279</sup> Françoise Dastur, *Death: An Essay on Finitude* (London: Athlone, 1996), 84.

*mullāh* (the religious clergy). On reading some of the key *shruks* of Nund Rishi on death, we can conclude that not only is Nund Rishi uncovering an existential idea of death in the everyday language of Kashmiri life but that he is also uncovering the existential phenomenon at the heart of his experience of Islam.

### Chapter 3

#### “Die before you die”: Becoming Nothing

The death of God is the *final* thought of philosophy, which proposes it as the *end* of religion: it is the thought towards which the Occident (which in this respect excludes neither Islam nor Buddhism) will not have ceased to tend.

Jean-Luc Nancy.<sup>280</sup>

The *shruks* of Nund Rishi bring us face-to-face with an existential encounter with death’s imminence. But what is the work that the recognition of death’s imminence do? In this chapter, I argue that Nund Rishi’s insistence on death’s imminence makes possible a dying before death. This dying before death sometimes appears in the call to becoming Nothing. The thinking of Nothing makes possible a relation to death. Let us turn to the following *shruk* taken up by Rahman Rahi in his critical essay on the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi that we also discussed in the previous Chapter:

*Zū neri bronṭh tu’*  
*Lobh nēri patu’*  
*Gatshan dṛon zu’ waṭu’*  
*Śunya ākār*<sup>281</sup>

The first to leave is life  
And only then avarice  
The two go on separate paths  
The form of the Nothing

Rahman Rahi turns to the modern theatre stage in an attempt to interpret this *shruk*. He sets up a play between *zū*, or *zūv* (life) and *lobh* (desire) which meet their end in the nothingness of death. *Zū neri bronṭhu’* (the first to leave, or depart, is life) gives us a

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<sup>280</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, “Des lieux divins” in *Qu’est-ce que Dieu?: Philosophie, Théologie: Hommage à l’abbé Daniel Coppieters de Gibson (1929-1983)* (Bruxelles: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 1985), 561. Quoted in and translated by William Franke, “Apophysis and the Turn of Philosophy to Religion: From Neoplatonic Theology to Postmodern Negation of Theology,” in “Self and Other: Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 60, No. 1/3, (Dec., 2006): 71.

<sup>281</sup> Rahman Rahi, *Kahvat: Tanqīdī maṣmūnan haṅz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 144.

palpable sense of someone's departure (in this case, *zū*, or life) before that of someone else (*lobh*, or avarice). It is, in other words, impossible for avarice to end before the end of life. *Lobh*, avaricious desire, has such a tenacious hold over life that it only leaves the stage after life has already departed.

The Buddhist resonance of this *shrūk* is put in relation by Nund Rishi to such Meccan Qur'anic verses as the following from the Surah *At-Takāthur*: "You are consumed with unending desire for more even until you die."<sup>282</sup> It is beyond the threshold of death that the paths of life and avarice fork, revealing the form of the Nothing. Or the way *zū* and *lobh* part is the form of the Nothing. Can such a project be undertaken in life before one's death? Is it possible to sever *zū* from *lobh* and become Nothing? Rahi conceives of *zū* and *lobh* as two characters in a play that depart the stage at opposite ends. *Zū* exits the stage in one direction and *lobh* in the other. But the emptiness that is suspended in the space in the middle is in Rahi's reading the form of the Nothing, the *shunya ākār*. Let us turn to Rahi's own words:

If you look at it carefully *zū* and *lobh* are two ordinary words from everyday Kashmiri speech which are almost synonymous with life and health (*dil bastagī*). But if you look again at these words with the eyes of poetic creation, you would have before you two tragic characters deeply in love separated forever by death and in such a way that both exit the stage in opposite directions. And what remains between them is Nothing. And this Nothing is *shunya ākār* or the space/form of the Nothing.<sup>283</sup>

Much like Rahman Rahi, the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani too turns to the metaphor of the stage to speak of this process of becoming Nothing which resembles

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<sup>282</sup> These are the first two verses of *At-Takāthur*, a Meccan Chapter of the Qur'ān, which have been translated by Ahmed Ali in these words: "The avarice of plenitude keeps you occupied. Till you reach the grave." *Al-Qur'ān: A Contemporary Translation*, tr. Ahmed Ali (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 549. The poignant translation reproduced above appears in a moving tribute by Talal Asad to his father, Muhammad Asad. See Talal Asad, "Muhammad Asad between Religion and Politics," *Interactive*, last modified March 11, 2012, <http://interactive.net.in/muhammad-asad-between-religion-and-politics/>.

<sup>283</sup> Rahman Rahi, *Kahvat: Tanqīdī mazmūnan hañz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 144.

dying before death:

Absolute selfhood opens up as nonobjectifiable nothingness in the conversion that takes place within personality. Through that conversion every bodily, mental, and spiritual activity that belongs to person displays itself as a play of shadows moving across the stage of nothingness. This stage represents the near side of the personal self. It is the field commonly seen as “outermost” by the personal self and referred to as the external world actually present in the here and now, ever changing. At the same time, it is the field of nothingness bursting forth from within the innermost depths of personal self. It is the ultimate realization and expression of nonobjectifiable – and, in that sense, elementally subjective-nothingness. It is the point beyond the innermost depth at which the subject transcends itself and converts into the outermost. It is the point of de-internalization, so to speak. Here the *without* is more *within* than the innermost. The “outer world” emerges here as a self-realization of nonobjectifiable nothingness, or, rather, makes itself present such as it is, in oneness with nothingness.<sup>284</sup>

The world and its play revealed on the stage of Nothingness bears a relation to the self. The moment the outer world of *zū* and *lobh* are revealed as the form of the Nothing, the self becomes Nothing, it is one with the Nothing. Nund Rishi speaks of *shunya ākār* also in relation to *samsāra* (the world) in another of his *shruks*:

*Athu' khor jachēm (ṭachēm) athi kontsh logum*  
*Chū nu' kath karān gōs sharamsār*  
*Nā kānsi ditsām nā kānsi zogum*  
*Samsār zonum mye shunya ākār*<sup>285</sup>

I worked hard with my hands and feet  
But could not get hold of him  
He refuses to speak to me and I am ashamed  
Neither did I give anything to anyone nor did I covet from anyone  
The world, I gathered, is the form of the Nothing

Nund Rishi reveals the world to have the form of nothingness (*shunya ākār*) because neither is the self able to give nor is it able to receive at will. The language addressed to the other also echoes and rebounds in silence. There is no answer which leads the self to an understanding of the *samsāra*, world, as *shunya ākār*, the form of Nothingness. The

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<sup>284</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, translated with an introduction by Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 73.

<sup>285</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 160.

world isn't the Nothing but has a form of Nothingness. Here in this *shruk*, we come across a conventional rejection of the world associated with asceticism in all the three major religious traditions of Kashmir: Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic. This understanding of the world as the Nothing makes exchanges in the world bereft of any meaning. But yet there is a searching for someone in the first line of the *shruk* and the shame of the self which receives no answer. We see in these *shruks* Buddhist themes suddenly interrupted by an Islamic idiom which throws open the question whether the dissonance between these idioms can be traced to the Nund Rishi corpus or if it signals later interpolations to arrest the radical charge of Nund Rishi's thinking.

In the *shruks* that deal with death and the Nothing, it is not merely enough for Nund Rishi to recognize life as having the form of nothing but this recognition must turn into a practice I am calling here "becoming nothing" and Nund Rishi calls "*Marnu' bronth mar bā*" ("Die before you die"). How does one become Nothing? *Shunya*, or the Nothing, in the Buddhist tradition has often been translated as Emptiness. To become Nothing resembles a certain kenosis, an emptying out of the self. Nund Rishi alludes to this shade of its meaning in the following *shruk*:

*Zū ti ɔtshu'e, pavan ti ɔtshu'e*  
*Tsyeth ti ɔtshu'e, ɔtshu'e sār*  
*Yiman padman mye vjetsār ɔtshue*  
*Bār khudāyā, pāp nivār*<sup>286</sup>

Life is empty, empty is the wind  
 The search is empty, empty the meaning  
 These verses of mine call to thinking  
 This burden of existence!  
 God, forgive my sins!

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<sup>286</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 58.

The Kashmiri word *ṛtshue* means empty or hollow. Nund Rishi not only calls *zū* (or life) and *pavan* (or wind) as empty but considers the *tsyeth* (search) of the human and all *sār* (meaning) as empty. He then invites the reader to a *vyetsār*, or thinking, of his *padas* (or verses). The *shruk* is part of a longer poem which ends with the refrain, *Bār khudāyā, pāp nivār* (And this burden of existence! God, forgive my sins). The refrain is paradoxical because it speaks of a heavy burden (the difficult burden which we also encountered in Chapter 2) which leads the poet to a simple prayer of submission to ask for God's forgiveness. This burden is clearly Islamic and concerns the accountability for human actions which makes a believer tremble in fear. But, as we witness in the *shruk* above, the *shruk* approaches existents, and existence, as empty. In the Islamic tradition, the world is treated as transitory, but it does not lack meaning. But here Nund Rishi affirms a fundamental meaninglessness of the world. The refrain *Bār khudāyā, pāp nivār* arrests the movement of the first two lines, which could be read as an affirmation of the emptiness of life, wind, human searching, and meaning by putting this meaninglessness to work for a traditional surrender in piety. The emptying out is often cast in Nund Rishi in conventional Sufi terms as a surrender of desire. But Nund Rishi often sets up a different encounter with the Nothing just as he does with death. The question of death then is bound up with the question of the Nothing. The Kashmiri word for the Nothing, *kenh nu'*, literally translates as No-Thing. But Nund Rishi also uses *Shunya* (Nothing), *Nāh* (naught), *Nafī* (Negation) and *nirguna* (without attributes, often 'God without attributes'). As Lal Ded puts it before Nund Rishi: *Kenh natu' manz kyāhtām drāv* (From the Nothing/Something came to be). In more than one *shruk*, Nund Rishi asks *Bu' nu'*

*kenh tu' mye kyāh nāv* (I am nothing. What is my name?). Nund Rishi also poses the rhetorical question in another longer poem: *Bu' kus Rishī mye kyāh nāv?* (What Rishi am I? What is my name?). It is through a defamiliarization of the name itself that Nund Rishi approaches the question of becoming nothing. The name is groundless and so is our being. Nund Rishi turns to the question of the Nothing more explicitly in the famous *shruk*, *Kuneare bozakh kuni no rozakh* (if you find unity/the One, you will become Nothing). What does it mean to become Nothing? Let us quote the *shruk* in full and turn to it in more detail:

*Kuneare bozakh kuni no rozakh*  
*Ām kunearan dyut kotah jalāv*  
*'Aql tu' fiqr tor kōt sozakh*  
*Kam māli chyeth hyok su dariyāv*<sup>287</sup>

The moment you realize the unity of Being  
 You become Nothing  
 This One-ness endlessly emanates  
 You cannot send your reason or thinking after it  
 Who, my dear, could drink up the ocean?

Why bring up this *shruk* when it is clearly a *shruk* about the Being of One in relation to the Nothing? Nowhere is the question of Nothing as insistent as it is with the question of being.<sup>288</sup> When Nund Rishi says “*Kuneare bozakh kuni no rozakh*” because the Kashmiri word *kuneare* has three meanings (the unity of Being, the oneness of human beings, but also solitude), these words could also translate as: “The moment you realize the Unity of Being, Oneness, Nothingness/ You become Nothing”. There emerges a deep

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<sup>287</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 37.

<sup>288</sup> As Martin Heidegger puts it: “The question about what is not and about Nothing has gone side by side with the question of what is, since its inception.” Richard Polt, “The Question of Nothing” in Richard Polt and Gregory Fried, eds, *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 60.

connection between the *kunear* of solitude and the *kunear* of nothingness in becoming Nothing. Does the ‘unity’ here not threaten the absolute transcendence of the monotheistic God so central to the Islamic tradition? Yet again we come upon the paradox involved in searching for God within in the Abrahamic faiths. Maurice Blanchot delimits a solution to this problem in the mysticisms of monotheistic faith in relation to Meister Eckhart in these terms:

God, as he is grasped as identical to the soul where he is revealed, is beyond substance and in no way offers himself as a subject that must be received as such. One must add that this experience that seems to suppress divine transcendence since it asserts the complete unity of the soul in its depths and of God in his depths is, in reality, the experience of transcendence. It is in soul itself that the leap is accomplished; it is in the soul that is hollowed out the abyss that no thought, no action, can cross. The beyond is inside us in a way that separates us forever from ourselves, and our nobility rests in this secret that causes us to reject ourselves absolutely in order to find ourselves absolutely.<sup>289</sup>

The *kunear* of solitude opens out the self to an abyss where we reject ourselves in order to find ourselves. This at least is the ascetic imperative. Let us reconsider the *shruk: Kuneare bozakh kuni no rozakh*. The Kashmiri verb *bozun* means ‘to hear’ or ‘to listen’ but it also carries the second meaning of ‘to consider’, ‘to reflect’, ‘to reckon,’ often in relation to an impending decision (for instance, in giving someone advice in relation to a decision, we may begin with *Bozakh hae...*(If you hear me...)). *Kuneare bozakh kuni no rozakh*: If you were to understand the meaning of the One, you will be dis-placed (*kuni no rozakh*). You will lose your station in life. You will become Nothing. For a moment, one is tempted to read *kuni no rozakh* as ‘you will come to nothing’ which could also mean that ‘you will lose everything (culture, faith, meaning)’ and the One here seems to be across the border of a nihilism. *Kuni no rozakh* also connotes a limit to experience. It

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<sup>289</sup> Maurice Blanchot, “Master Eckhart,” in *Faux Pas*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 26.

can also mean that your search is going to reveal nothing. And then the line: *Ām kunearan dyut kotah jalāv* (The One-ness endlessly emanates). It is now revealed that the destitution of the self, its solitude, has a relation with another *kunear*, the *kunear* of Oneness. It isn't clear that if this is an external *kunear* (of Oneness or transcendence) or if it is the ecstasy of the *kunear* (of solitude) of the self. The One here is beyond measure and it is given to a giving (*dyut*) which is an emanation (*jalāv*). This is the *jalāv* of the *tajalli illāhī* (divine emanation). The 'light' is a possible, though not necessary, translation of what emanates. It is not clear what emanates from the Oneness of the One [is it an (over)flow of light or life, love or care, death or torture?] since everything appears to emanate from the place which is no-place. The emanation here bears witness to the exchange between Neoplatonism and Sufism. But the emanation is also an endless calling. The solitude is in a state of overflowing. We hear an echo of this in Lal Ded: *Zū chum bramān garu' gatshu'hā* (My life spills over with the desire for home). This is consistent with emanationist schemas in Neoplatonism, but in a reversal. Both Nund Rishi and Lal Ded use the word *zū*, which is untranslatable as soul, and can only be translated as life, or the vital life-force (like the Greek, *menos*).

The beginnings of knowledge are in the thinking of unity, which is inseparable from human action. But this action is seen in relation to a withdrawal to solitude. In Nund Rishi, the unity (or Oneness) of being is made possible by a certain concealment.

*Yus os tati suy chu yati*  
*Suy chu prath jāyi ratith makān*  
*Suy chu pyādu' tu' suy chu rathu'*  
*Suy chu sorīy gupit pān*<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 249.

The one who is there is also over here  
Is the one who has taken every place  
He is the soldier and he the chariot  
He is the one hiding everywhere

We are here close to the Sufi idea of the immanence of divinity and the multiplicity of its forms that resonates strongly with Vedanta. We are here not far from Neoplatonic Sufi metaphysics which left a deep impact on Indo-Persian Sufism across the different Sufi Orders, and the regional South Asian Sufi Orders, which emerged in a dialogue with the trans-regional Sufi Orders. The Sufi metaphysics of Ibn al-‘Arabī’ had, in particular, influenced the Kubrāwiyya Sufi Order with which Nund Rishi must have been familiar, since some hagiographies mention that his parents were disciples of the Kubrāwiyya Sufi, Syed Hussain Simnani.<sup>291</sup>

The *Kubrāwiyyā*, in any case, wielded a strong influence over the Kashmiri Court. But it is more likely that such ideas of the unity of being were already in circulation in the region among different traditions. The third line of the *shruk* is: ‘*Aql tu’ fiqr tor kōt sozakh*. Here we come across a more familiar Sufi trope. How and where will you send reason (‘*aql*) and thinking (*fiqr*) in search of the One? The One is seen here beyond all searching. There is a difference here between ‘*aql* (reason) and *fiqr* (thinking) but both are useless in the search for the One. Yet again, the divinity is disclosed in relation to a spatial metaphor: the *tor* (that place) is beyond all searching but connected to the unity of all being. The gap between an immanent ‘here’ and the transcendental ‘there’ also alludes to the Qur’ānic narrative of Muhammad’s journey (*mi’rāj*, ascension to heaven) to God.

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<sup>291</sup> The biographical detail is unnecessary since the late fourteenth century Kashmir is a site of active missionary work by the *Kubrāwiyyā* Sufis. But many hagiographies are in agreement that either one, or both, of Nund Rishi’s parents were disciples of Syed Hussain Simnani.

This could also be interpreted as an inner journey but the metaphor is spatial. This line of the *shruk* also resonates with the Qur'anic narratives of not only Muhammad's ascension to the heavens where he is drawn close to God but also of Moses' encounter with God, which reduces a mountain to ash. Even the Prophets cannot draw near to the mystery of Oneness which is the strongest attribute of God in the Islamic tradition. We have already seen that if one were to know the One, one will be in no (one) place: it would be an absolute transcendence. Both *'aql* and *fiqr* are near to us but can never search the One that grounds the One-ness of the many. The rejection of *'aql* is a common trope in Sufi poetry. The Kashmiri *kunear* is also a site of privation: a destitution and solitude.

The Kashmiri word *fiqr* is the same as the Arabic *fiqr* which means thinking. But it also connotes in Kashmiri (as it does in Hindi and Urdu) the meaning of anxiety. The *fiqr* (thinking) which sets out in search of the One (possibly with the aim of becoming One) comes up against the nothing. But the *fiqr* is set on this path by the experience of anxiety that comes over it in its relation to beings as Not-One and its experience of that which grounds it as not a wholeness but a groundless transcendence. The last line of the *shruk* returns us to the everyday: a sage addressing his Kashmiri audience with affection: *Kam māli chyeth hyok su dariyāv* (Who, my dear, could drink up the ocean?). The child of the *shruk* is the desiring human self. The meaning of *dariyāv* is river in Kashmiri but it may be proper to translate it here as an 'ocean' or 'sea' which is already the meaning of the original Persian *dariyāv*. The ocean here is clearly inflected with the Sanskrit *samudrā* which carries the meaning of open space. It is impossible to drink from this ocean without risking annihilation. Nund Rishi often ends his *shruks* in a mode of

affection, as his piercing advice addressed to his disciples gathers force. In this *shruk*, Nund Rishi affirms a radical finitude in relation to the transcendence of the One, and warns against any movement towards infinity. We discern a tension in this *shruk* between the Neoplatonic One and the Nothing. Nund Rishi speaks of the *kunear*, of Oneness and solitude, but situates it beyond the reach of *'aql* (reason) and *fiqr* (thinking). But there is no explicit trace of the Nothing in this *shruk* except in the negation of the second line and the privation of the third.

This brings us to one of the more significant claims of this dissertation: Nund Rishi advances his thinking against the background of multiple traditions, which might give rise to paradoxes that may be suppressed in individual attempts to read Nund Rishi from one or the other pole of the paradox. My contention is that Nund Rishi works with these contradictions without fear or anxiety, perhaps even indifferent to the contradictions, as his thoughts leaps across multiple traditions in a flight which is not an escape. It builds on the insights of multiple traditions to open up a path to thinking 'unity, 'oneness,' and 'solitude,' which must first surrender its ambition and then encounter the ineffable *kunear*, beyond surrender. The thinking of 'unity' assumes significance against the historical background of sectarian tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the fourteenth century.

In yet another *shruk*, Nund Rishi contemplates the source of the ocean. Or the source of the Nothing?

*'Alimuk āgur chu kalimuk ma 'ne*  
*Kreyi hund āgur mīni khen*  
*Shuniyuhuk āgur pāna 'e zāne*

*Ṣadruk āgur labi no tshen*<sup>292</sup>

The origin of knowledge is the meaning of the *kalimā*  
The origin of action is renunciation (measured diet, literally)  
The ground of Nothing [*Shunya*] only He knows  
The origin of the ocean: you'll never find a break

The origins of knowledge, or its beginnings, are in the *kalimā*, which carries the meaning of the Word and is also the name of the first article of Muslim faith. But this first article of Muslim faith, *La illāha ila allāha*, or the *kalima*, also affirms the unity and transcendence of God through negation. It is then a consideration of the *kalimā*, and the negation at the heart of it, that gives access to knowledge. Nund Rishi then connects the origin of all human action to a measured diet, or in other words, to moderation. The path to moderation is made possible by the negation that animates the faith in an unknown God. Nund Rishi then turns to the origin of Nothing (*shuniyuhuk āgur*) and concedes that the knowledge of this only belongs to God. The Nothing is then likened in the last line to an ocean without any break. As we have already seen in the earlier *shruk*, the human attempt to send 'aql and *fiqr* after the Nothing is compared by Nund Rishi to a childish attempt to gulp down the ocean. The way the *kalimā*, or the divine word, opens up a path to true knowledge in the words of the *shruk* open up a path to the Nothing. It is not just the *zū* (life) or the *pavan* (wind) which are *ṭshu'e* (empty), but the words of the *shruk* hold up a mirror to not only the emptiness of signifiers but also that of the signified. The word used here for ocean, *ṣadur*, is also used by Lal Ded in the following famous *vākh* (the word is transcribed slightly differently in the Kamil and Kaul texts):

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<sup>292</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 2106. The first article of the Muslim faith affirming the unity of God. *Kalimā* can also be translated as the 'word' or 'speech.'

*Āmi panu' sōdrus nāvi chas lamān*  
*Kati boziy da'e myon mye ti diyi tār*  
*Āmyen tākyen poni zan shamān*  
*Zū chum bramān garu' gachu'hā*<sup>293</sup>

Nund Rishi makes this explicit in yet another *shruk*, where the interplay between *fiqr* (thinking) and being reveals the self as nothing:

*Tshānjām bonan beyi shyen dishan*  
*Neb tu' nishanu' lobmas nu' kune*  
*Pritshām malu' bāban tape ryeshan*  
*Tim laq būz būz rāvu'ne (rivni)*  
*Dab yali dyutmas fiqre andeshan*  
*Adu' su dyunthum bu' nu' kune*<sup>294</sup>

I looked for him inside and in six directions  
I could not even find a trace  
I turned to the *mullahs*, elders and sages  
The more they heard me, the more they got irritated  
But when I searched for him in my anxiety and fears  
I could then see him but I was nowhere

Nund Rishi reveals that having searched his inner experience and the six directions, he could not find any trace of God. He then speaks of his questioning of *mullahs*, dervishes, and *rishis* but reveals that all of them got irritated with his questions. But it is only when he wrestles with his thinking and anxiety, he gets the *darshana* (or vision) of the divinity (here invoked by the impersonal pronoun, *su*) but his own self is nowhere to be found (*bu' nu' kune*: I am nowhere). Nund Rishi invokes the disappearance of his self in his *shruks* as a way of either erasing his own identity as a teacher of spirituality in the Kashmiri tradition (as in the *shruk* where he says *bu' kus rishī mye kyāh nāv*/What Rishi am I? What is my name?) or a forgetting of his name or place. The relation to the

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<sup>293</sup> J L Kaul, *Lal Ded* (Srinagar: Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1984), 62.

<sup>294</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 245.

Nothing is then connected to this forgetting of both the name and place. In Nund Rishi's mystical poetry, this namelessness or placelessness remains connected to asceticism. The price of transcendence is becoming Nothing. But this becoming Nothing isn't only an ascetic operation but is connected to our ruinant existence. Nund Rishi speaks of his experience of becoming Nothing (*nāh*: naught) in unflattering terms in the following

*shruk*:

*Prenis badnas malyun dāg gom*  
*Zāg gom nīrith bāgh andre*  
*Hārni garmī poh ta māg gom*  
*Zazarani choku' hani hani dāh gom*  
*Gōnāh gām tsar tu' kahe ubre*  
*Myuth tu' modur khyeth und siyāh gom*  
*Nāh gom pānas rah kas karu*<sup>295</sup>

My pure being stained with impurities  
 The bird (of the Self) has escaped the garden (of the body)  
 The hot summer of my youth faces the bitter chill of winter  
 The wounds of decay waste every part of my body  
 The sins have increased – how can I bounce back?  
 Addicted to tastes sweet, my inner being is a darkness  
 And I have become Nothing—who can I blame?

The unstained body of youth is now covered over with stains. The bird (of life) has escaped the garden (of the body). In some versions, the second line appears as *Phāh gom nīrith har bandrē* (the heat escaped from every part of my body). Both lines allude to the slow ruination of the human body over time. This meaning is brought out clearly by the third line which mourns the passing of the *hārni garmī* (the heat of summer) which must now face the winter months of *poh* and *māg* (the coldest months of the winter in the Kashmiri calendar from middle of December to the middle of February). The poet speaks

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<sup>295</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 43.

of his state of physical and spiritual decline as the winter months of *poh* and *māg*. But becoming winter also carries a sense of being reduced or diminished. This sense comes across in the last line: *Nāh gom pānas rah kas karu'* (And I have become Nothing – who can I blame?). This idea of a slow ruination appears in Rahman Dar's mystical poem *Shash Rang* (a poem which the writer Akhtar Mohiudeen considered one of the three best works in Kashmiri literature). Rahman Dar connects this ruination to the experience of love: *Khotsan chu nu' pāpan tu' zājnas ashqu' tāpan/ Pāh pan bu' wājnas lājnas tshyepan taiy qarham tawiz pan* (He has no fear of sins and has burnt me in the fire of love/ I fall weightless like an autumn leaf as if in a spell). In the poem by Rahman Dar, the same idea of ruination is invoked where the self is compared to a dry, weightless, autumn leaf which falls in involuntary surrender burnt by the fire of love). The same way the self cannot pass on the burden of youth to someone else in the Nund Rishi *shruk* we examined in the previous chapter, the self cannot blame anyone for being reduced to Nothing. It had been destined to become Nothing. This process is unmitigatingly physical: *Zazarani choku' hani hani dāh gom* (The wounds of decay waste every part of my body). But Nund Rishi then speaks of the accumulation of sins that make it impossible for him to escape this ruination and the sweetness of appetites that fuels this inner darkness. These two lines don't seem to go well with the rest of the *shruk* and could be a later interpolation. The Nothing appears in this *shruk* to be more intimately connected with life. This is a bleak vision of the human condition, and indeed in many of these *shruks* Nund Rishi offers us no hope. But the meditation on the work of the Nothing produces a relation to it, one of love and melancholy. The death-work of the Nothing is

the signature of our temporal existence. But the poet's words nonetheless measure out the cycles of a ruinant *samsāra* offering the reader/audience an escape, or at least the illusion of an escape.

The slow ruination of human life, and its invocation in poetry, foreshadows death. But the recognition of the work of death in life can also offer an escape from its terrible grip which can lead to inaction. For Nund Rishi, it is the fear of death that is responsible for forgetting in the world:

*Zuvo tse boz to kanu'vān*  
*Yi ho mārīnu'n khabar shinvān che*  
*Kāl haṇḍis zan nine puj vān*  
*Yi gāsu' kān duniyahic bramvān che*<sup>296</sup>

My life, please open your ears to this  
This news of death which reduces you to Nothing  
A time will come when you'll be taken a lamb to the slaughterhouse  
A twig of grass are these works of the world's illusions

In this *shruk*, the slow-approaching of Death keeps reducing the being to Nothing (*shinvān*: make nothing). But the word *shinvān* here can also mean “to melt” or “to freeze.” The knowledge of death reduces the self to Nothing: it freezes human action (this recalls the *poh* and *māg*, the winter months, of the earlier *shruk*). It is striking how Nund Rishi uses a metaphor which was likely to make a powerful impact on poor Kashmiris who had to face harsh winters. Nund Rishi exacerbates the effect of terror by reminding his reader that he is soon going to be carried away by death as a lamb is taken to the slaughterhouse. Such a fate compels the poet to compare the world's play of illusions to a *gāsu' kān* (a twig of grass) which has no weight or value. Is there a difference between

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<sup>296</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 54.

the becoming Nothing as ruination and becoming Nothing as silence? The becoming Nothing also appears in Nund Rishi as a prayer addressed to an absent God. In yet another *shruk*, Nund Rishi addresses the *nirguna* (God without form/attributes):

*Nirguna tsu' royatu' ditam*  
*Chus bu' cyone nāv saran*  
*Bhugih Kailāsh khārith nitam*  
*Chuham tsyetas tsu' meharbān*<sup>297</sup>

Nirguna, give me your face to see  
All I do is contemplate your Name  
God, carry me to the Mount Kailash  
I always remember you the gracious one

Is the *nirguna* an absent God or the Nothing? *Nirguna* in monistic Hindu thought is a spiritual experience in which all distinctions are obliterated. We are already up against the problem of translation and translatability. But even in the Hindu tradition, and the Buddhist tradition, the *nirguna* and the *shunya* cannot be read in isolation from a practice of self-transformation. All this returns me to the lines Jacques Derrida quotes from the Christian mystic, Angelus Silesius on becoming Nothing in his collection of essays, *Sauf le Nom*:

*To become Nothing is to become God*  
Nothing becomes what is before: if you do not become nothing,  
Never will you be born of eternal light.<sup>298</sup>

Let us now turn to Derrida's exegesis of this verse from Angelus Silesius:

How is this becoming to be thought? *Werden*: at once birth and change, formation and transformation. This coming to being starting from nothing and as nothing, as God and as Nothing, as the Nothing itself, this birth that *carries itself* without premise, this becoming-self as becoming-God – or Nothing – that is what appears impossible, more than impossible, the most impossible possible, more impossible than the impossible if the impossible is the simple negative modality of the possible.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 62.

<sup>298</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 43.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

Our inquiry into the Nothing then is our inquiry into ourselves. Our temporal finitude is what is at stake in the thinking of the Nothing. When we turn to Nund Rishi's powerful images of Death: water disappearing into new clay vessels, shops after closing time (the image of *fālav*, the long iron crossbars which are used as locks in traditional Kashmiri shops), the scattering-shattering of the arrows of Death, we realize that everything has a fragile meaning in relation to our own meaning as the being which is in a relation to death and the Nothing. Heidegger has an early term for this work of the Nothing which fits our needs well here: ruination (*Ruinanz*). This *ruinanz* is later replaced by falling.<sup>300</sup> But ruination captures better the fate of the human subject in the world and it is the task of poetry and philosophy, of poetic thinking, as Heidegger would prefer it, that it combat such ruination. I venture that the *shruk* does not merely intend to terrorise with its themes of death and the nothing, but hopes to combat the hold of death and the nothing through an invitation to a meditation over life. Heidegger speaks of this ruination also as larvance and destruction in an early lecture course on Aristotle.<sup>301</sup> The factual life becomes Nothing in ruinant existence. Ruinance is nothing but the temporal movement of life: if ruinance is a crash through emptiness, negative theology's meditation on ruinance can be interpreted as a philosophical counter-ruinance. Nund Rishi repeatedly bemoans the loss of time in searching for an escape from temporal finitude where fundamental decisions can be avoided. The subjective experience of ruination is evoked by Nund Rishi in the *shruk* quoted above where a pure (*pren*) body is despoiled by stains of impurity and the

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<sup>300</sup> Richard Polt, *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, edited by Richard Polt and Gregory Fried (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 68.

<sup>301</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

bird of the self escapes the garden, the pleasant sunshine of a Kashmiri summer suddenly turns to bitter chill of the winter, and all essences abandon the self suddenly struck by a primordial poverty. We get a sense of the spiritual crisis of Nund Rishi in relation to the factual world and its ruination in another *shruk*:

*Ganbar prakat karān chum kāv*  
*Tīrū'h chanyem anbar bāve kas*  
*Sar gom gur tu' vøkhael gayim nāv*  
*Bor gom gob tu' trāve kas*<sup>302</sup>

The crow unveils its destiny to me  
 All the feathers that covered my body are a heap of dust  
 My mind-horse is out of control and the boat of life has run aground  
 This burden has become heavy and I cannot even pass it on

Rahman Rahi, in his exegesis of this *shruk*, writes: “Leaving aside the symbolic meaning to one side (and of those symbols which are to be found in this *shruk*, there is a long tradition of such symbols in Kashmiri poetry), the veils of secrecy which are sculpted by the *shruk* are unique, restless and shattering. The poet is in a state of an extreme difficulty...”<sup>303</sup> The spiritual situation is brought to life in both Nund Rishi and Lal Ded often in time-images that are images of life stilled and stalled by ruination. It is only through an encounter with the Nothing that one can reach authenticity, home, life, pleasure, and meaning. It is significant that it is an inability to handle beings which is written into the legends of Nund Rishi’s traditional biographies: a young Nund Rishi fails at different crafts and trades as he ponders over the contingency of meaning in those life-worlds (as weaver, thief, and peasant) but in the end retreats to the forest for years of solitary meditation.

<sup>302</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 231.

<sup>303</sup> Rahman Rahi, *Kahvat: Tanqīdī mazmūnan hañz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 150.

One of the more difficult aporias negative theology must always deal with now that we are speaking about Heidegger is put in the form of a question by Jacques Derrida in his influential essay “Faith and knowledge: the two sources of ‘religion’ at the limits of reason alone”: “In its most abstract form, then, the aporia within which we are struggling would perhaps be the following: is revealability (*Offenbarkeit*) more originary than revelation (*Offenbarung*), and hence independent of all religion?”<sup>304</sup> Like most Sufis, Nund Rishi’s negative theology sides with revealability against revelation and gives rise to tensions between the Rishi movement and the Sufi orthodoxy in medieval Kashmir (a tension expressed elsewhere in the Islamic tradition as an uneasy, and sometimes difficult, relation between theology itself and Sufism).

The question of Nothing always returns us to the question of Being by bringing us up against Death. Nund Rishi writes:

*Yatu’ ti mye tsū’i tati ti mye tsū’i*  
*Mye tsū’i kartam gulzār*  
*Sārī trāvīth rotukh mye tsū’i*  
*Mye tsū’i hāvtam dīdar*<sup>305</sup>

Here you are enough for me; and you are enough for me over there  
 You alone can make this clay blossom into flowers  
 I left everything and hold on to you alone  
 You alone now show me your face

The *mye* (mine) is bound up with the Thou (*tsū’i*: only You). But the *shruk* that announces the economy of this relay between I-Thou, where each is sufficient for the other and where the *mye* (My) relies on the *tsu’* (You) for a flowering in the

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<sup>304</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Faith and knowledge: the two sources of ‘religion’ at the limits of reason alone,” in *Acts of Religion*, edited with an introduction by Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 54.

<sup>305</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu’* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 78.

self's desert, is rent by the homonym *myetsū'i* (only clay). This double register is less obvious in the rest of the two lines where a prayer is addressed to the other for a more fundamental disclosure in which God must give at least a *dīdār*, sighting, as God did to Moses). The first two lines can be reread as "Only dust here and only dust there/turn this desert into a flower." The meaning also shifts in the last line if we were to take up the other meaning of the homonym where the line could now appear as a call for a revelation, an advent of the Other, in the desert of the immanent. The last line could now read: "Show me your face in this clay." This *shruk* reveals the striking resemblance negative theology bears at times to radical atheism: the reliance of *mye-tsū'i* (to me, you alone), which carries an echo of the Quranic *Hasbunallah wa ni'mal-wakil* (You alone God are sufficient for me!), is threatened by the facticity and finitude of *myetsū'i* (only clay).

We must now consider the Nothing in the immediate environment in which Nund Rishi's thinking takes place and which not only was familiar with the Hindu ideas of the Nothing but also the *Shunyata* (Emptiness) of Buddhist thought. Nund Rishi composes his *shruks* long after the decline of Mulasarvastivadin Buddhist thought in Kashmir. Even the different flourishing schools of Saiva and Vaishnava thought had shrunk to forms of Trika and Kaula Saivism (grouped together as Kashmir Saivism in contemporary scholarship) by the fifteenth century. It is difficult to speculate how many of these ideas informed Nund Rishi's thinking. But the concept of *Shunya* is very much there in Nund Rishi. There are also clear references to Shaiva thinking. Only a comparative study of Nund Rishi's thinking in relation to Buddhist, Vaishnava, Shaiva, Sufi, Bhaktī and Sikh

thought can offer us vital clues to the thinking of the *shunya* (Nothing), or the *sahaja* (the innate, or the spontaneous) in Nund Rishi (a key concept I take up in Chapter 5).

It is important to remember though that the term *Shunyata* has a phenomenological thrust in Buddhism: it is used to precipitate a thinking of “the way things really are.”<sup>306</sup> Much like early Greek philosophy, the Buddhist thinking on the Nothing did not develop in isolation from a spiritual practice of self-transformation. We are aware also of the emphasis in the later Buddhist schools such as Zen on “Becoming Emptiness.” The Buddhist *Shunya* never implied privation or lack but was a dynamic concept in the tradition. Even though the Buddhist Nothing has been a source of much controversy, it is neither being nor non-being. For negative theology, as we have seen in the case of Angelus Silesius and Nund Rishi, it was not merely the question of knowing Nothing which was at stake but also becoming Nothing. Negative theology decides to go further than knowing Nothing. One must become nothing in a ‘dying before death’, a *kenosis*, which opens up along the path of retreating from the world and sometimes even negating the world as “an arena of sin, lust, and empty vanity.”<sup>307</sup>

This is also the struggle which is at stake in Nund Rishi: to push language to the limits of encounter rather than merely seeking a *unio mystica*. How does one search for the Nothing? Even an attempt to answer this question can leave speech paralysed. As Beckett writes: “What am I to do, what shall I do, in my situation, how proceed? By *aporia* pure and simple.”<sup>308</sup> Nund Rishi admonishes the

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<sup>306</sup> In Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, s.v. “Śūnyam and Śūnyatā.”

<sup>307</sup> Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>308</sup> Quoted in Connor Cunningham, “Preface” in *Genealogies of Nihilism* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xii.

paralysed self: *Kyāh karu' kyāh karu' tsolay nu' zanh* (What shall I do? What must I do? You never gave up on this). This is a refrain through many of the *shruks* clustered together by Amin Kamil in his edition of the *Nūrnāma*.

Let us address now the question of negative theology in Nund Rishi through one of the first few *shruks* of the Moti Lal Saqi anthology:

*La Illāhā ṣahih korum*  
*Waḥi korum panun pān*  
*Wūjūd travith mūjūd myūlum*  
*Adu' bu' votus lā makān*<sup>309</sup>

I decided on “There is no god but God”  
And made of my self a site of revelation  
Abandoning existence, I found presence  
Thus have I reached the place-less place

There are other variants of this *shruk* given by Saqi that already help us establish an equivalence between certain key terms as interpreted by the tradition. In the second version, *La Illāhā ṣahih korum* is substituted by *Naḥī Isbāt ṣahih korum* (I decided on the negation-affirmation). This makes possible a Sufi interpretation of the *kalimā*, the first article of the Muslim faith (with which Nund Rishi begins the first version), as beginning with a negation followed by an affirmation. The first article of the Muslim faith is also considered to be the foundation of Islam expressed in the Islamic concept of *Tawhīd*, or unity of God. Elsewhere Nund Rishi speaks of the way his thinking has been shaped by the meditation on the *kalimā* – a fundamental Sufi practice:

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<sup>309</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 29. There are many variants of the *shruk*. I have just substituted the last line of the *shruk* from the *Nūrnāmu'* variant quoted by Saqi. The *shruk* appears this form in B N Parimoo's selections (except for the word *myūlum* which is replaced by the word *sorum*). See B N Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1984), 124-25.

*Kalimye porum kalimye sorum*  
*Kalimye korum panun pān*  
*Kalimye hani hani moyan torum*  
*Kalimye sāt votus lā makān*<sup>310</sup>

I read the *kalimā*, I contemplated the *kalimā*  
I made of my self the *kalimā*  
I absorbed the *kalimā* into every hair on my body  
And by the *kalimā*, I reached the place-less place

But let us return to the key *shruk* which begins the Moti Lal Saqi anthology: *La*

*Illāhā ṣahih korum. Ṣahih korum* could simply mean recitation, avowal, or owning  
but it also carries the meanings of decision and correction or returning something to  
its right and proper origin. Nund Rishi explicitly takes up the *nafi-iṣbāt* question in  
the following long *shruk*:

*Pānai chu gindān nafi-iṣbātas*  
*Akis sātās labyas nu' tshyēn*  
*Ārayish ditsu 'n prath ṣifātas*  
*Zātas lobun nu' marun ta zyan*  
*Sharaf bakhshun hazrat-e insaan-as*  
*Truke chukh tu' pānai tsen*  
*Soruy pānay vuchakh kyāh pānas*  
*Rātas labi na nyendar tu' khēn*  
*Timav nu' dhyān kor ath gyānas*  
*Anis chhu hiyuv rāth tu' dyēn*<sup>311</sup>

He plays himself with affirmation-negation  
Not even for a moment you'll find his absence  
He adorned (*ārayish*: adornment) every attribute  
No birth or death for essences  
He gave this gift to the human  
If you are wise, know yourself  
You are the whole yourself, what would you discover in the self?  
You'll find neither sleep nor food at night  
The ones who pay no attention to this teaching

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<sup>310</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 105.

<sup>311</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 48. Saqi gives an alternative to line 3 which I have used here. Ibid., fn 2.

The blind: there is no difference for them between night or day

This *shruk* speaks of the attributes of an unknown God. Is the negation-affirmation dialectic of the *kalimā* the same as the *naḥī-iṣbāt* of South Asian Sufi traditions? The *naḥī-iṣbāt* is not only the problem of predicating God's existence through negations. The way of *naḥī-iṣbāt* also becomes a serious political and theological question in medieval South Asia, as is obvious from the case of Sarmad, whose execution by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707), Nauman Naqvi has connected to the controversies around the problem of *naḥī/iṣbāt*:

The most legendary charge [against Sarmad], however, was that which is now synoptically remembered as the matter of negation and assertion (*naḥī-o-asbat*). For in reciting the first article of the Muslim faith, the *kalima-e-shahadat* —literally, “the word of witness”— Sarmad Shaheed would merely say, *la ilaha*: no assertion of the singular Divinity (Allah) and the prophethood of Muhammad, just *la ilaha* —“there is absolutely no God.” When interrogated by the judge (*qazi*), he explained that he was yet unable to rise to assertion since he had not witnessed—*mushahida* or *shahadat* —the Most High. Needless to say, this was unacceptable under the new dispensation, and so he was executed.<sup>312</sup>

Yet again we witness that the charge that negative theology unproblematically affirms a faith in a Being beyond beings is in question and that negative theology in the Islamic tradition often found itself accused of outright heresy.

Let us now turn to the second line of the *shruk* we have taken up for discussion: *Waḥi korum panun pān*. This is the second step. To turn one's self into a revelation. *Panun Pān* can translate as one's own self. But this is not a *pān* (self) appropriating for oneself the ownmost of the self but one that makes, in a decision, the *panun pān* (one's self) a site of revelation. But what does it mean to turn one's self into the site of a revelation? This could have two possible meanings: 1) to move towards the experience of

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<sup>312</sup> Nauman Naqvi, “Acts Of Askēsis, Scenes Of Poiēsis: The Dramatic Phenomenology Of Another Violence In A Muslim Painter-Poet” in *Diacritics* Volume 40, Number 2 (Summer 2012), 58-59.

the self as a site of revelation, as a place of God, as Emmanuel Levinas puts it, through an endless kenosis, or, 2) to turn away from all metalanguages towards the finitude of the self itself as the self's only possible transcendence. The third line is even more intriguing. *Wūjūd travith mūjūd myūlum*: abandoning existence, I found presence. The presence here has less to do with metaphysics and more with the presencing (*anwesen*) of later Heidegger (where presencing as unconcealment is in a relation to absence). To find presence is to find an unconcealment in the self as a site of revelation. But one must abandon existence for such a presencing: one must become Nothing. There is a sense in which there is here a turn away here from the world. This searching holds the promise of an arriving at the *la-makān*, the placeless place, which to us carries echoes of the *khora* from Plato's *Timaeus*, about which Derrida says that it is not Nothing but "a desert in the desert of which it is neither a threshold nor a mourning."<sup>313</sup>

For Nund Rishi, the *la-makān*, the no-place, is the absence on which all presencing depends. Even the metaphor of being this side of the river, waiting to cross over, meandering on the riverbank, mourning the absences, lacks and losses that have characterized life (metaphors that endlessly proliferate in Kashmiri mystical poetry) reveal to us a subject grappling with nihilations. This sense is more deeper and profound in Lal Ded than it is in Nund Rishi. But in Nund Rishi, it achieves a massive reconfiguration under the sign of an Islamic eschatological thinking. Henry Corbin, the French scholar of Islamic philosophy and mysticism who also happens to be the first French translator of Heidegger, has denounced the tendency towards the "unreality of the

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<sup>313</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Faith and knowledge: the two sources of 'religion' at the limits of reason alone," in *Acts of Religion*, edited with an introduction by Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 59.

ego” in certain forms of Sufism that confuse the unity of *wājūd* (existence) with the unity of *mūjūd* (existents). Corbin writes:

Such a decision is marked, indeed stained, by the same confusion denounced by our Iranian metaphysicians of the Avicennian tradition, to wit (*sic*), the confusing of the transcendental unity of Being or Existence (*wahdat al wujud*) with an impossible, contradictory and illusory unity of existents or existent being(s) (*mawjud*, latin *ens*). These Avicennian metaphysicians vigorously denounced this same confusion committed by the practitioners of a particular brand of Sufism...<sup>314</sup>

But Nund Rishi affirms the *mūjūd* (present, presence) having abandoned the *wājūd* (existence). *Mūjūd* can also be translated as Presence but is not merely the presence of the present-at-hand which Nund Rishi speaks of finding but the presencing of presence.

Nund Rishi’s affirmation of the *mūjūd* could also be read in relation to the affirmation of finitude which we come across in such *bhaktī* thinkers as Kabir. The *ku’near* Nund Rishi speaks of is not necessarily that of the absolute, but of a unity that eludes understanding but grounds our temporal finitude. What is at stake in these difficult, paradoxical utterances? These affirmations and the negations. Blanchot writes about Eckhart that he takes “recourse to a violent form because his thinking demands this violence, this ‘yes’ and ‘no’ intimately united, but he consciously chooses the most shocking form so that thought can receive it only in a tension that strips away its repose and destroys it and prepares it for silence.”<sup>315</sup> How are these affirmations and negations connected to the question of Nothing? Keiji Nishitani explicates these connections by reflecting on the meaning of a Christian creation *ex nihilo*:

That a thing is created *ex nihilo* means that this *nihil* is more immanent in that thing than the very being of that thing is “immanent” in the thing itself. This is why we speak of “absolute immanence.” It is an immanence of absolute negation, for the being of the created is grounded upon a *nothingness* and seen fundamentally to be a nothingness. At the same time,

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<sup>314</sup> Henry Corbin, “Apophatic Theology as an Antidote to Nihilism,” *Umbr(a)* 2007. This has clear resonances with a similar critique of *wajūdi* thought in South Asia by Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624).

<sup>315</sup> Maurice Blanchot, “Master Eckhart,” 25.

it is an immanence of absolute affirmation, for the nothingness of the created is the ground of its *being*. This is the omnipresence of God in all things that have their being as a *creatio ex nihilo*. It follows that this omnipresence can be said to represent for man the dynamic *motif* of the transposition of absolute negation and absolute affirmation. To entrust the self to this *motif*, to let oneself be driven by it so as to die to the self and live in God, is what constitutes faith.<sup>316</sup>

Here there is a closing of the gap in Nishitani between God and Nothingness. But Nund Rishi speaks of Nothing only in relation to creaturely life. Nund Rishi speaks of *nāh karun* (to make Nothing) in a way similar to Angelus Silesius' call to *Become Nothing*: to be driven by the motif of nihilation (and its presencing in ruination) is to surrender to the other beyond stratagem or renunciation.<sup>317</sup> This is how a Japanese philosopher, Ueda Shizuteru, considers the relations between Meister Eckhart's Nothingness and a 'fundamental death' which is a movement away from God towards a Nothingness:

Hence the soul, in order to return to its original ground, must break through God and out into the nothingness of the godhead. In so doing the soul must "take leave of God" and "become void of God." This is accomplished only if the soul lets go of itself as what has been united with God. This is what Eckhart understands by extreme "solitariness," the "fundamental death."<sup>318</sup>

The extreme solitariness, the *kunear*, is a 'fundamental death,' or in the language of Sufism, a dying before death. But one must risk losing God in this fundamental death as much as losing one's self. What is most striking about this dying is that such a movement is not without a purpose or consequences for the world: "In unison with the movement 'away from God to the nothingness of the godhead' goes a movement 'away from God to the reality of the world.'"<sup>319</sup> It returns the self to the reality of the world, and for Shizuteru, to "a non-religious religiosity."<sup>320</sup> This 'non-religious religiosity' could also be

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<sup>316</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 39-40.

<sup>317</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995)

<sup>318</sup> Ueda Shizuteru, "Nothingness in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism" in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School and its Contemporaries*, ed. by Frederick Franck (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 158.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*

seen as one of the most significant stakes of the *bhaktī* movement, to which Nund Rishi remains in relation. Shizuteru interprets the affirmation that comes after the negation of negative theology, a return to the world, as what he calls “a coincidence of negation and affirmation, of nothingness and here-and-now actuality.”<sup>321</sup>

We must turn to Keiji Nishitani for a more explicit consideration of the relations between mysticism, the Nothing and Death:

Our life runs up against death at its every step; we keep one foot planted in the vale of death at all times. Our life stands poised at the brink of the abyss of nihility to which it may return at any moment. Our existence is an existence at one with nonexistence, swinging back and forth over nihility, ceaselessly passing away and ceaselessly regaining its existence. This is what is called the “incessant becoming” of existence.<sup>322</sup>

Negative theology, including that of Nund Rishi, is this proximate awareness of Death. But to what end? The Greek philosopher Epicurus (*Letter to Menoecus*) declared that “death is nothing to us seeing that when we exist death is not present, and when death is present we do not exist.”<sup>323</sup> But Keiji Nishitani makes explicit what is implicit in the ‘becoming Nothing’ of Angelus Silesius or the *lā makān* and *Sunya* of Nund Rishi:

...we come to the realization of death and nihility when we see them within ourselves as constituting the basis of our life and existence. We awaken to their reality when we see them as extending beyond the subjective realm, lying concealed at the ground of all that exists, at the ground of the world itself. This awareness implies more than merely looking contemplatively at death and nihility. It means that the self realizes their presence at the foundations of its existence, that it sees them from the final frontier of its self-existence.<sup>324</sup>

We have seen in the last chapter that Nund Rishi is not merely expressing an awareness or contemplation of death but rather death is to be found at the foundations of human

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 4.

<sup>323</sup> Phillip Mitsis, “Where Death Is, There We Are Not” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Death*, edited by Ben Bradley et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 207.

<sup>324</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 16.

existence. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, Nishitani writes, the stance of a radical doubt towards existence is called ‘the Great Death’ which is absolutely essential for a Zen practitioner.<sup>325</sup> This radical doubt has little to do with the radical doubt of the thinking-substance of Descartes. The discourses of negative theology are phenomenologies of that which shows up in relation to death. Be it the severe and relentless questioning of the *nafs*, the desiring ego, or the questioning of Being, negative theology is always in a movement out from particular existentials to an existential understanding of temporal finitude. Take, for instance, the *Nafs*. *Nafs* is neither ego nor self and has a complex genealogy in the Islamic tradition and interpretations vary from the grammatical to the phenomenological. *Nafs* marks reflexive grammatical constructions in Arabic like ‘He saw himself’ but, in Sufism, it suggests the locus of self-centred life.<sup>326</sup> The term *nafs* appears often in the Qur’an. There is a Qur’anic verse: “Each *nafs* will be reckoned only according to itself, and no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another.”<sup>327</sup> The death of a *nafs* is in the direct control of God: “...And it does not belong to a *nafs* to die except with the permission of God at a term written down.”<sup>328</sup> For the Islamic philosophers, as opposed to the traditionalists, the post-mortem experiences are incorporeal:

...Islamic philosophers held a view that post-mortem experiences are incorporeal, and the Qur’anic reference to physical pain and pleasure as experienced in the Hereafter is only figurative. For example, in his Epistle on Afterlife (*Al-risala al-adhawiyya fi al ma’ad*), Ibn Sina reminds us that the concept of “future life” — *al-ma’ad* — is semantically linked to the

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>326</sup> Michael Sells, ed., *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Quran, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996), 147.

<sup>327</sup> John Bowker, *The Meanings of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 112.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 123.

notion of return (*'awd*). In the Qur'an, God issues a command, 'Oh you quiescent soul [*nafs*], return to your Lord, well-pleased and well-pleasing.' (Q89:27-28).<sup>329</sup>

The Islamic thinker, Fazlur Rahman has contested this interpretation of Ibn Sīnā. Fazlur Rahman contends that the Islamic hereafter is not peopled by disembodied souls and that the term *nafs* which, in Islamic philosophy and Sufism, came to mean soul as a substance separate from the body, in the Qur'ān only means mostly "himself" or "herself" ...<sup>330</sup> Rahman sees *nafs* as nothing but a reflexive pronoun in the Qur'ān. For Rahman, the Qur'ān does not recognize a dualism between the soul and the body.<sup>331</sup> The *nafs* refers, for Rahman, to the person of man including a certain life-and-intelligence center as his or her inner identity, and is the subject of Qur'ānic heaven or hell.<sup>332</sup> Certain passages in the Qur'an do imply death as a separation of soul from the body in the Greek sense. The word *nafs* in Nund Rishi, however, is used more in the Sufi sense as a blameworthy ego that must be brought under control. The voluntary death imitates the power of death in relation to the rule of the *nafs*. For instance, take this *shruk*:

*Nafasu 'ī myon chue mad hostue*  
*Ām ḥas monganam kotāh bal*  
*Sāsan manzu 'h chue akhā ḷostue*  
*Natu ' āmi h̄yetinam sārī tal*<sup>333</sup>

*Nafs* is a mad elephant  
This elephant has drained me of all strength  
Only one in a thousand escapes its power  
Everyone else it tramples under its feet

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<sup>329</sup> Amila Buturovic, "Death" in Jamal J Elias, *Key Themes for the Study of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 131.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 173.

Nund Rishi subjects the experience of the *nafs* to a radical doubt and calls for a dying of this ‘ego-self’ for a more enduring life. But only one in a thousand can escape the power of the *nafs*. The *nafs* here recalls the mad elephant which charged at the Buddha with murderous intent but then suddenly became calm and kneeled before him. The task of the ascetic is to tame the mad *nafs*. Nishitani’s own synoptic account of Christianity is helpful in approaching the stakes in Nund Rishi’s appropriation of the Sufi theme of the annihilation of *nafs*, or the ‘lower’ self:

Christianity has long considered the egoistic mode of being that is basic to the reality of man as a form of disobedience against God, as an original sin. The alternative it offers is the way to a new man who, rather than following his own will, forsakes it to follow the will of God, who dies to self in order to live in God.<sup>334</sup>

Nishitani also speaks of a ‘dying before death’ as a rebirth “when we break through nihilty.”<sup>335</sup> The death involves the dying of a form of willing (such a willing, in turn, is taken as a sign of ignorance). Such a call to surrender can translate poorly into politics and Sufism can then appear as little more than political quietitude. The surrender is often expressed in Sufism through the concept of *tawakkul*, absolute trust in God. But everything is at stake in the question whether God here is the unknowable God of negative theology or the unknowable God of an orthodox Islamic theology. But it is useful to remember that despite his invocation of God, Nishitani does not speak of the God of metaphysics. As James W. Heisig reminds us, the idea of God in the philosophers of the Kyoto school (Heisig speaks of an ‘apophatic drift’ in Kyoto school philosophy) serves “as a kind of metaphor for the essential oneness of the experience of awareness with reality just as it is, a service it performs precisely as an idea or image functioning in

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<sup>334</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 36.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

the minds of those who believe in God.”<sup>336</sup> Not an idol or image of God but that which we seek to name in the improper name(s) of God. It is this imageless image of God that Nund Rishi cryptically alludes to as *kunear*. It is a radical reading of the Islamic concept of *tawhīd* as absolute transcendence. Even though the idea gathered as *wahdat al-wujūd* in the Sufi tradition and attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabi, the great Andalusian Sufi, does not approach the unity of God as an absolute transcendence and often rejects the opposition between immanence-transcendence in thinking about God, Nund Rishi’s use of *kunear* connects the idea of unity with the call to an ascetic self-transformation. In both Christianity and Islam, the absolute transcendence of God is fundamental. Christianity deals with this by speaking of a creation *ex nihilo*. As Nishitani writes:

Christianity speaks of a *creatio ex nihilo*: God created everything from a point at which there was nothing at all. And since all things have this *nihilum* at the ground of their being, they are absolutely distinct from their Creator. This idea is a plain expression of the absolute transcendence of God.<sup>337</sup>

The idea of a *creatio ex nihilo* takes care of the problem of the immanence of God. To experience the nothingness of things is to come up against the separation between man and God, which is like an iron wall. Our experience of creation is an experience of the Nothing that calls us to and yet separates us from God:

If things are telling us that they were created by God, then they also are telling us that they are not themselves God. To that extent, we do not encounter God anywhere in the world. Instead, we find everywhere, at the ground of everything that is, the nihility of the *creatio ex nihilo*. This nihility stands like a great iron wall that absolutely separates all things from God. Accordingly, to encounter this nihility means necessarily to encounter God as an iron wall, to meet with the absolute negativity of God...<sup>338</sup>

There is thus an encounter with God, but God cannot be seen as an immanence. It is

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<sup>336</sup> James W Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: an essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 16.

<sup>337</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 37.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

undecidable if this is the *kunear*, or unity, that Nund Rishi has in mind. But even in the Christian tradition, according to Nishitani, this encounter with God in all things, everywhere, everyday, must begin with a self-transformation. Nishitani writes: “Hence for anyone, whoever he happens to be, encountering the omnipresence of God existentially must begin with a sense of having been cast out into the middle of a desert of death.”<sup>339</sup> One must search for death in the everyday with the purpose of being born again in the everyday. For Nishitani, this political-eschatological dimension has a clear existential significance which forces a decision on the self:

The fact that the gospel of the Kingdom of God has an eschatological dimension signifies, from the existential standpoint, that the *motif* of conversion for man implied in divine omnipresence confronts man with an urgency that presses him to a decision on the spot: either eternal life or eternal death. This is the meaning of what was said earlier about the love of Christ being at one and the same time a sword that kills man and a sword that gives man life. It means that there is an undercurrent running through the gospel to the effect that no matter where a man is or what he is doing, he comes into touch with the cutting sword of *de-cision*. Only in this way might eschatology be said to be a problem of human Existenz.<sup>340</sup>

The problem of eschatology is connected to the decision which forever presses on the self. That is the reason Nund Rishi is mournful of the surrender of this sword of decision:

*Kartu’l Phatram tu’ garṃas drāt* (I broke the sword and fashioned sickles out of it).<sup>341</sup>

The *shruks* of Nund Rishi bring the reader to the site of an encounter with the decision.

For Nishitani, negative theology is connected to the question of the independence of man.<sup>342</sup> It is the possibility of freedom that opens out in the question of death that

engages the thinkers of medieval South Asian Sufi and *bhakti* traditions. For Nishitani,

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>341</sup> It is ironical then that the line with which the Indian State chose to adorn the first bus it flagged off in 2005 between the disputed regions of a divided Kashmir in its peace initiative was this one from Nund Rishi. It did not occur to anyone that Nund Rishi in the cited *shruk* actually mourns the loss of his sword. For an excellent discussion of this *shruk*, see Nazir Azad, “*Kartu’l Phatram tu’ garṃas drāt*” *Alamdār* (Kashmiri), Volume 5, Number 5, 99-113.

<sup>342</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 61.

we must speak of God the way Eckhart speaks of God as absolute nothingness (it is interesting that Eckhart has come to exemplify the position of Christian negative theology, and is used here as elsewhere, as the paradigmatic example of Christian negative theology just as Ibn al-‘Arabi and Rumi mark similar pathways in medieval Sufisms). The meanings of terms such as ‘man,’ ‘God,’ ‘nothingness’ but also ‘freedom’ shift radically in negative theology. One need not escape the world of everydayness to come up against the field of nothingness. It can be “be lived right in the midst of everyday life in the immediacy of which it discloses itself.”<sup>343</sup> As the Sufis put it: *khilvat dar anjuman* (solitude in the assembly).

What are the political stakes of this thinking of the Nothing? Keiji Nishitani, for instance, once claimed that what is at stake for him is the possibility that the world “has no specific center....”<sup>344</sup> Michel de Certeau also turns to this relation between the question of Nothing and politics in medieval mysticism:

The fact that the mystics enclosed themselves in the circle of a “nothingness” capable of being an “origin” is to be explained, first of all, by their having been caught up in a *radical* situation they took seriously. They have translated that situation into their texts, not only in the relation an innovative truth bears throughout with the pain of a loss, but, more explicitly, in the social figures that dominate their discourse, those of the madman, the child, the illiterate.<sup>345</sup>

In this turn to the Nothing, we cannot ignore those multitudes, which were seen in an absolutist politics mired in caste and clan, as little more than nothing. There is a complete reevaluation, a revolution, in the ways Nund Rishi makes the figures of the illiterate, madman and the child central to his sustained critique of knowledge. This questioning of

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>344</sup> James W Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: an essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 198.

<sup>345</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The mystic fable*, 24-25.

the *mullah* (the theologian) as a figure of knowledge also acquires an even more charged meaning in fifteenth-century Kashmir where there are strong contestations over the meaning of Islam and controversies over the *Sharī'ah* (Islamic Law). It is perhaps for this reason that Nund Rishi invokes the figure of Rumi as a true theologian against those he calls impostors:

*Nyebra'e shubāl, andru'h shūmī*  
*Minbaran khasan tu' qar qar kār*  
*Malla'e he dapzi he tu' Molvi Rūmī*  
*Natu' Mallu' dīshith istighfār*<sup>346</sup>  
 Pleasing on the outside, rotten on the inside  
 They sermonize from the pulpit after evil deeds  
 If you do want to speak of a Mullah, it is Maulana Rumi  
 Or else seek God's refuge if you sight a Mullah

Nund Rishi warns his followers to seek the refuge of Allah even at the mere sight of an *'ālim* (religious scholar).<sup>347</sup> This suspicion of knowledge is common to Sufism throughout South Asia in the medieval period and signals the rise of oppressed castes and classes struggling against a decaying political and religious establishment in fourteenth-fifteenth century Kashmir. This attitude towards theology also has strong parallels with Nicholas of Cusa's "learned ignorance."<sup>348</sup>

The primary audiences of Nund Rishi in rural Kashmir were the new Muslim converts. Even though Nund Rishi turned to the resources of a Kashmiri peasant tradition, he also had to mediate the experience of Islam for the Kashmiri peasantry.

The call to "die before you die" as a voluntary death takes the form of either an ascetic

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<sup>346</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 183. This is a sharp attack on the figure of the *mullah*, who is compared to the great Sufi poet of love, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī.

<sup>347</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 112.

<sup>348</sup> Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard, "Preface," in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 10.

kenosis or a Sufi annihilation of the self. But Nund Rishi's understanding of this voluntary death also draws upon the traditional Islamic understanding of death based upon the Qur'ān and the collections of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad called *ḥadīth*. There are about 165 Qur'ānic verses and thousands of *ḥadīth* that deal with death in Islam.<sup>349</sup> The Sufi call to "die before you die" must also be read against the background of the Islamic understanding of death. Death of mortals, in Islam, is a matter of the will of God. Most Muslims recite the Qur'ānic formula "Surely we are for God, and to Him we shall return" (2:156) at a time of difficulty or death and this gives us an idea that death appears in Islam as a moment of passage in the journey of man, which begins much before his birth and ends much after his death, in a relation to a nearness or distance from God.<sup>350</sup> This is also a journey predetermined by God.

In the Islamic tradition, death is a passage to that which awaits the individual after death. Death is something which is individual in each and every case but is also a threshold to a new, albeit different, life. Death is the border beyond which repentance is no longer is possible. The Apocalypse is in the Qur'ān, the Event (*Al-waqi'ah*), to which death points as a provisional stopover after the soul goes into a phenomenological deep-freeze called the *barzakh*.

John Bowker writes that Islam "represents the understanding of death, in the western religious history and tradition, at its furthest extreme of formalisation."<sup>351</sup> Clearly that formalisation appears time and again in Nund Rishi (for instance, in the *shruks* about

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<sup>349</sup> Hussam S. Timani, "Death and Dying in Islam" in *Ultimate Journey: Death and Dying in the World's Major Religions*, ed. Steven J. Rosen (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 60.

<sup>350</sup> *Al-Qur'ān: A Contemporary Translation*, tr. Ahmed Ali (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 30.

<sup>351</sup> John Bowker, *The Meanings of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 127.

the trials and tribulations of the grave, a fundamental theme in the Islamic tradition) but is expressed in its economy in Nund Rishi in his engagement with the Islamic thinking of the Apocalyptic (a subject I take up in the next Chapter). Nund Rishi's thinking on the questions of death turn on a reading of the Qur'ān. For Nund Rishi, the experience of reading the Qur'ān was, to borrow a phrase from Jacques Derrida, that "which leaves nothing intact"<sup>352</sup>:

*Qur'ān parān kono mūdikh*  
*Qur'ān parān goe no sūr*  
*Qur'ān parān zindu' kyithu' rūdikh*  
*Qur'ān parān dod Mansūr*

Did you not die after reading the Qur'ān?  
 How did you survive after reading the Qur'ān?  
 Did you not burn to ashes after reading the Qur'ān  
 Mansoor set himself on fire after reading the Qur'ān.<sup>353</sup>

There appears in Nund Rishi a relation between the experience of reading the Qur'ān and a dying before death. As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, the Qur'ānic thinking of death enabled a social and political critique by the Rishis of the new Islamic State in Kashmir. But here Nund Rishi urges the reader to a different and radical reading of the Qur'ān, which would indeed leave nothing intact. His thinking of death is impossible to treat in isolation from the Islamic idea of a life-beyond-death after a cataclysmic Day of Reckoning. This event of catastrophe is often brought close by Nund Rishi so as to approach it as an event in inner space. Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad

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<sup>352</sup> This phrase is used by Jacques Derrida in different contexts. See, for instance, David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, *Derrida and Différance*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 74.

<sup>353</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al- 'Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 37. This *shruk* is given as a set of two *shruks* in the Moti Lal Saqi edition of Nund Rishi's mystical verse. I have here quoted only the first *shruk*, which is more widely popular and often quoted. The reference is to Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, an Islamic mystic, executed on the orders of the Abassid Caliph for his heterodoxy. Many Islamic mystics consider Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj to be a Sufi martyr and we will discuss Nund Rishi's relation to Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj in Chapter 5.

remind us: “So intense is the Qur’ānic concern for and insistence on the day to come when all will be held accountable for their faith and their actions, that the ethical teachings contained in the Book must be understood in the light of this reality.”<sup>354</sup> One could almost repeat this verbatim for Nund Rishi: so central is the theme of death in Nund Rishi’s poetry that Nund Rishi’s whole oeuvre and teaching must be understood in the light of this reality. Nund Rishi turns these ethical teachings as a call to action in the present. But if he affirms traditional Islamic eschatology, how does one approach his Sufi call to “die before you die”?

In his classic study *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data*, Thomas O’Shaughnessy points out that the subject of death occupies “a place of growing frequency and importance in the Qur’an as one passes from the Meccan to the Medinan period” of the life of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>355</sup> The earliest uses of death in the Qur’ān are metaphorical and from the Meccan *Sūrah*s. O’Shaughnessy quotes two Qur’ānic verses (50:11 and 25:49-51) which speak of a dead land which is made alive by rain.<sup>356</sup> The Qur’ān also speaks of ‘dead earth.’<sup>357</sup> The earliest occurrence of “death” in the Qur’ān is in relation to these nature metaphors used in what O’Shaughnessy designates as sign passages.<sup>358</sup> This theme then slides over into the theme of God’s omnipotence.<sup>359</sup> The third set of occurrences is traced by O’Shaughnessy to the analogies of the deaths of disbelief and hell. The Qur’ān in the Medinan period turns gradually

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<sup>354</sup> Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 2.

<sup>355</sup> Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), vii.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

from the theme of death to the related one of the transitoriness of life: “the life one leaves behind at death is not a worthy object of attachment, certainly not a thing to be clung to.”

<sup>360</sup> Nund Rishi directly quotes a Qur’ānic verse which proclaims the universality of death in one of his *shruks*: *kullu nafsin zaiqat al-maut* (Every soul shall taste death, Qur’ān 3:185). This universality of death is affirmed in the Qur’ān three times in this formula, “Every soul shall taste death,” a rabbinic expression that also runs through the New Testament.<sup>361</sup> O’Shaughnessy writes: “‘Tasting’ is a broad term in the Qur’ān and is often equivalent to ‘perceiving’ or ‘feeling,’ for example, God’s mercy or grace...<sup>362</sup> But what does it mean to taste death? Hussam S. Timani quotes the following Prophetic *ḥadīth*: “God communicated to Adam the following: ‘O Adam! Go on your pilgrimage before something happens to you.’ Adam replied: ‘What is going to happen to me, O God?’ Then God answered: ‘Something that you are not aware of, that is death.’ ‘What is death?’ Adam replied. God said: ‘You will taste it.’”<sup>363</sup> Sometimes death, in the Qur’ān is also viewed as a release from a burdensome life.<sup>364</sup> Yet everyone must go through the agony of death. O’Shaughnessy writes:

The word for ‘agony’ *sakrah*, literally means ‘intoxication.’ Lane sums up the commentators by defining the word used here as the irrationality and oppression attendant on death, and Bell translates it as ‘the drunken sleep of death.’<sup>365</sup>

*Sakaratul maut* (the agony of death) is a phrase which has passed on to Kashmiri language from Arabic and is still in use. In Sūrah 50, the Qur’ān speaks of this pain: “The

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Hussam S. Timani, “Death and Dying in Islam” in *Ultimate Journey: Death and Dying in the World’s Major Religions*, ed. Steven J. Rosen (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 61.

<sup>364</sup> Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 59.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 69.

palsy of death will surely come. This is what you wished to avert.”<sup>366</sup> The *sakarāt* also means stupor or intoxication. The agony of death is not only unpredictable and inescapable but also irrational and oppressive. The Qur’ān also employs *adraka*, ‘catches up with,’ in relation to death.<sup>367</sup> Death always catches up with human beings. It is this theme of its stealthy operations Nund Rishi invokes through the metaphor of thievery. Death is called *lazal chūr*, a stealthy thief, by Nund Rishi.

The Sufi call to a voluntary dying is traced back to the *ḥadīth* about death by Prophet Muhammad widely disseminated by the Sufis: “Die before you die.” The question for us is not the authenticity of this *ḥadīth* but its centrality to the Sufi tradition.<sup>368</sup> Nund Rishi often repeats it in his verses in phrases like *Marnas bronth mar* (‘die before you die’). This is a fundamental recurring motif in Nund Rishi’s poetry. For instance, let us consider this *shruk*:

*Manas khae kāś yithu’ kāśi ānas*  
*Tavu’ zanas sāet gatsiy zān*  
*Talu’ talu’ kyāh chhuy shrehuk pānas*  
*Marnas bronth mar suiy chhuiy gyān*<sup>369</sup>

Polish your heart as if a mirror  
 You will then recognize the one  
 Why this deep attachment to the self?  
 Die before you die: this is true knowledge

A tension emerges here between the Qur’ānic concept of death as a moment of transition, reckoning, catastrophe that must give way to an after-life and the concept of death as a

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<sup>366</sup> *Al-Qur’ān: A Contemporary Translation*, tr. Ahmed Ali (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 447.

<sup>367</sup> Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 75.

<sup>368</sup> Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 168.

<sup>369</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu’* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 233.

form of knowledge and practice that leads to a transformation of the self. In the Qur’ān, death also carries the meaning of “a symbol of a relatively fixed state of disbelief.”<sup>370</sup> ‘Die before you die,’ therefore, could also imply to die to the self in order to avoid the death of disbelief and Hell and thereby gain a second life. But it could also hint at a secret knowledge of the self implied in the Neoplatonic idea of polishing the mirror of the heart to let the truth shine into it. In another Qur’ānic verse, those who have found faith are considered as the dead brought to life by a light: “(Consider the man) who was dead and whom We made live. For him too We placed a light by which he might walk among men.” (6:122)<sup>371</sup>

Death is and is not universal. As the Bosnian Islamic Studies scholar, Amila Buturovic, reminds us:

Death is subject to appropriation, fascination, and often veneration; it is taken hostage by multiple disciplinary and cultural forms and sensibilities. It is a representational category. It may be universal biologically but it is not universal conceptually.<sup>372</sup>

In pre-Islamic cultures of Arabia, a socially meaningful life ended with death but death was also a figure of Fate.<sup>373</sup> The Qur’ān (45:24) itself gives us an example of what the pre-Islamic attitudes were like: “Yet they say: ‘There is nothing but the life of this world. We die and we live, and only time annihilates us.’”<sup>374</sup> In the same verse, the Qur’ān adds: “Yet they have no knowledge of this: They only speculate.” Amila Buturovic writes: “The *dahr* – translated variably as time, destiny, or fate – is the guiding principle of pre-

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<sup>370</sup> Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data*, 9.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>372</sup> Amila Buturovic, “Death” in Jamal J. Elias, *Key Themes for the Study of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 123.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>374</sup> *Al-Qur’ān: A Contemporary Translation*, tr. Ahmed Ali (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 429.

Islamic cosmology that carries no particular fascination with constructing immortality. Like *maniyya* — fate or destiny — *dahr* is unpredictable and wicked in its workings in the *dunya* (the world), subjecting the living to its whims and leaving them with a feeling of having no control over their existence.”<sup>375</sup> This view of a resigned acceptance of death as fate had determined pre-Islamic Arab life. And it is precisely this resignation to fate that Nund Rishi appears to challenge in his meditations on death. But Nund Rishi radicalizes Islamic understanding of death by going beyond merely affirming a faith in a life-beyond-death to death as a head-on existential encounter with the meaning of life.

The fate of human beings was not seen as arbitrary by the Qur’ān. According to the Qur’ān, our life and death are a matter of God’s will. For God, “the mere command BE is sufficient to bring into existence all which He, in His supreme wisdom and according to His overall plan for the universe, chooses to create.”<sup>376</sup> The pre-Islamic Arabs considered each human life to be for a fixed term, or *ajal*, a concept taken up by Islam but made subject to God’s will. But Qur’ān reveals a new message of hope and following “the pessimism of the people who felt themselves under the sway of an impersonal force leading inevitably and only to personal death came the conception that life has a purpose, that the events of human history, both individual and communal, are in the hands of a just and merciful God, and that death is not the end but a passage to a new and eternal existence.”<sup>377</sup> Yet Nund Rishi does not merely hold out the hope of an eternal existence in the after-life but turns to the power of death to transform individual and

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<sup>375</sup> Amila Buturovic, “Death”, 124.

<sup>376</sup> Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 2.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

political existence. For him, death becomes nothing less than a new way of thinking the freedom of the human.

Nund Rishi combines Islamic eschatology with a pre-Islamic Neoplatonic concern with the transformation of the self through a meditation of and on the self, its finitude, and its relation to death. The thinking of death in Nund Rishi's *shruks* can be read at the same time as an assertion of traditional Islamic understanding of death, as well as a call to an ascetic transformation of the self. But what is of even more significance is the political charge of Nund Rishi's *shruks*. Like many controversial Sufis of the past such as Maṣū̄r al-Ḥallāj, Nund Rishi explicitly brings up political questions in the *shruks*. This move can be seen either in a relation to the origins of Sufism as a political protest against the imperial turn in the revolution of early Islam. But it can also be seen in relation to the *bhaktī* protest movements against upper-caste hegemony over social and religious life throughout North India which is contemporary with the rise of the Rishi movement. It is not a mere coincidence that the Rishi movement is addressed in vernacular Kashmiri and Urdu as a *tahrīk*, or movement. It is striking that the Rishi *tahrīk* was, and remains, more powerful among the peasantry than it is in Srinagar. There is just one Rishi shrine in that city.

As Yahya Michot has argued, many medieval Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) developed a hermeneutic that challenged the theological doctrine of bodily resurrection and bodily torments in classical Islamic

eschatology.<sup>378</sup> Philosophers such as Avicenna set up a dichotomy between the outward and inward meanings of revelation that became a problem in the intellectual history of Sufism.<sup>379</sup> A dichotomy persisted between the manifest and hidden meanings of death. From al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīna to Miskawayh, fear of death came to be seen in the history of Islamic philosophy as a moral ill. But the freedom from fear of death did not mean that one did not remember death: remembrance of death and the after-life remained central to Islamic spiritual practice. Nund Rishi often turns to this remembrance of death, trembling with fear about a final reckoning. In the following *shruk*, he sees the world itself as a trap and a “dying before death” as the only possibility of action in it:

*Shiva chu zāvyul zāl vahārith*  
*Tiy chu marun tirath kath*  
*Zindu’ nae marakh adu’ kavu’ zi murith*  
*Pānu’ manz pān kad vjetsārith kath*<sup>380</sup>

Shiva has cast a delicate net  
 You must go across with death  
 If you don’t die before you die, that is no death  
 You must search for the self in the self

Nund Rishi invokes Siva’s net to speak of an Islamic eschatological crossing. Even though the *shruk* is about death and dying before death, it calls for a searching of the self to reach the self. According to the Islamic philosopher, Miskawayh, death is a “process in which the soul leaves the body so as to advance toward a more pure state of being” and

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<sup>378</sup> Yahya Michot, “Life after Death from a Muslim Perspective” in Norman Solomon, Richard D. Harries, and Tim J. Winter, eds, *Abraham's children: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in conversation* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

<sup>379</sup> The persistence of this problem can be gleaned even in twentieth century Islamic scholars and Sufis such as Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi.

<sup>380</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 41.

he too proposes, following Plato, a voluntary death “a condition that, thanks to knowledge and wisdom, reduces one’s anxieties and concerns about death and rids the body of destructive emotions.”<sup>381</sup> The Andalusian Sufi Ibn al-‘Arabi explicated the Sufi call to “die before you die” in these words: “One dies when, by God’s will, one’s borrowed time ends. One’s material being – which is called life – ending at an appointed hour, loses all its character and qualities both good and bad, and nothing remains. In their place God comes to be. One’s self becomes God’s self; one’s attributes become God’s attributes. That is what the Prophet...meant when he said, “Die before dying.”<sup>382</sup> This recalls the Nund Rishi *shruk* where he speaks of *vaḥi kōrum panun pān* (turned my self into a site of revelation). Hussam S. Timani further explicates the attitude of the Sufis towards death:

The Sufis accept death as a gift from God. Based on this belief, death is no longer a source of fear. A Sufi teaching says: “Die before you die.” The interpretation of this teaching is that we should learn what death has to teach us before it is too late. In Sufi tradition, the wisdom and knowledge we gain at death reveal the true value of life.<sup>383</sup>

The attitudes to death, however, kept changing in the history of Islamic thought. This is at its most obvious in the gradual supplementation of the Qur’ānic notion of the separation of the soul from the body with the idea of the grave as a place for punishment. Buturovic writes:

The tomb, far from being a resting place, had by al-Ghazali’s times been conceptualized as a place of change. As Leor Halevi suggests, by the mid-eighth century, the tomb had already come to be understood as the place of punishment and possible redemption of sins although the religious function of that punishment was not entirely clear. Rejecting the Mu’tazalite denial that the tomb houses any real experiences, Muslim traditionists sought to assign to the grave a purgative function for those who had not asked for forgiveness for their sins before they passed away, and a punitive function for those whose sinful and bad acts had taken them

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<sup>381</sup> Amila Buturovic, “Death”, 131.

<sup>382</sup> Quoted in Hussam S. Timani, “Death and Dying in Islam” in *Ultimate Journey: Death and Dying in the World’s Major Religions*, ed. Steven J. Rosen (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 79.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

to the point beyond redemption. In that sense, the Qur’anic notion of the precipitous ejection of the soul from the body to the outer spheres of existence is gradually replaced, in post-Qur’anic times, by a notion of a more approximate bond between the body and the spirit in the *barzakh* of the grave.<sup>384</sup>

There isn’t any explicit rejection of either classical Islamic eschatology or Islamic philosophical thinking on death in Nund Rishi. We could also read many of his *shruks* on bodily torments after death as an affirmation of the Muslim traditionalist position or as a return to the Qur’anic notions of death. The Qur’ān does not offer us many details on the actual process of death except that the soul of the dying person rises to the throat (56:82) and that death is a kind of “flooding-in process [*ghamarāt al-maut*] at which time angels stretch forth their hands and ask that the souls be given over to them.”<sup>385</sup> The angel of death, *‘Izrā’īl*, immense and fearsome to behold, appears with death to demand that a human being surrender his or her soul. The wider Islamic tradition adds to this the detailed narratives on the punishments of the grave (*‘adhāb al-qabr*) and the questioning by the angels Munkar and Nakīr.<sup>386</sup> These two angels are fearsome and ask a human being difficult questions about the content of his or her faith.<sup>387</sup> Nund Rishi addresses the theme of the questioning by the angels Munkar and Nakīr in one of his *shruks*:

*Nakīr tu’ Munkar javābas vasan*  
*Parbat tsasan hābat sāt*  
*Shūblis pānas māran tu’ dasan*  
*Bāch tu’ pothar mo vasan sāt*  
*Kuniy su’ zānis chim āvasun*  
*Lasan pāe natu’ maran kāt*  
*Bukri pyethu’ yeli kafan kasan*

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<sup>384</sup> Amila Buturovic, “Death”, 130-31.

<sup>385</sup> Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 31.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

*Saraf tu' gunsu' vasan sāt*<sup>388</sup>

The angels Nakīr and Munkar shall descend down on you  
The mountains shall shrink back in fear  
Your beloved body tormented and torn  
No family, no children shall be in the grave with you  
I must bear the punishment on my own  
I must tread with care  
Before the shroud is tightened on my bier  
And the snakes and reptiles enter my grave.

Here Nund Rishi turns to the horrific images in the traditionalist Islamic eschatology to shock the listener into recognition of his self as that of a being-towards-death. Nund Rishi often turns to the experience of *adhāb-e qabr* (the punishments of the grave). But he also uses the punishments of the grave to provoke human beings to a thinking about their lives and actions:

*Ādijan sapnī anjaru' panjaro*  
*Tsyetas pāvīy avalim rāth*  
*Pānas chānis gatshi zaru' zaro*  
*Kyāh karu' kyāh karu' tsoluay nu' zāth*<sup>389</sup>

Your bones will be shattered and scattered  
You shall remember on the first night  
Your body will be broken into pieces  
You never gave up on – What shall I do? What shall I do?

Death is connected in Islam to the *ākhirāh* (the end) and the promise of an after-life. This was contrary to pre-Islamic Arab thinking of Death, in which the end of all ends was, in the words of Amila Buturovic, “a cul-de-sac that could only be counteracted by a full and fulfilling engagement with life.”<sup>390</sup> The Islamic understanding of death openly

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<sup>388</sup> G. N. Gauhar, *Kashmir Mystic Thought* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2008), 401. For a slightly different version of this *shruk*, please see Asadullah Afaqi, *Ā'inā-e Ḥaq: Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Life Foundation, 2008), 117-8.

<sup>389</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnamu'*, 162.

<sup>390</sup> Amila Buturovic, “Death”, 124.

challenged the pre-Islamic notions of “a chaotic and arbitrary beginning and end of individual life” by evoking the divine justice that “puts order in the seemingly random cycles of life and death...”<sup>391</sup> No longer could it be said that death was not a concern for a human being because he or she is not present at the time of death. Buturovic cites the Qur’an (6:162) as exhorting to an owning up to one’s death. It is in an owning up of one’s death in as much as one belongs to God. But it is also in this owning up to death that one gives up control over one’s death and in return gains control over one’s life. Death is no longer a dead-end but “a gift from God, and ...related to the nature of God’s relationship to human beings.”<sup>392</sup> Nund Rishi’s call to “die before you die” is not only an owning up to death but it is also an owning up to one’s life. It is precisely the owning up to death which paradoxically prepares one for death and liberates from crippling fear. The fear of death should only be there in those who have not led righteous lives, according to the Qur’ān, and not for those who have led righteous lives.<sup>393</sup> It is this idea of right action to which Nund Rishi keeps returning in his thinking of death. The question at stake, then, is the question of how one lives in the world. Or how must one transform oneself to live properly in the world. Nund Rishi says in one of his *shruks*:

*Asi bronth yim āe timav yotsh tapu’  
 Chanu’ dapu’ dapu’ manz hāsīl kyāt  
 Maranas chum yūt kyāh trapu’ trapu’  
 Gāsīl sombrām vāsīl kyāt*<sup>394</sup>

Those who came before us also wished to die last  
 The more you wish so, the more futile it is  
 Why then even this rush to death?

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Rahman Rahi, *Kahvat: Tanqīdī maḥmūnan haṅz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 160.

I gathered mere empty straw, what did I gain from life?

As Amila Buturovic suggests, “Islamic spiritual traditions developed their own ways of reformulating death, divesting it of its usual sense of terror and finality, and assigning to it a new ritual and spiritual function that can be embraced as gain, not loss.”<sup>395</sup> The Qur’ān expects a Believer to express willingness to give up one’s life.<sup>396</sup>

Writing about the Qur’ānic concept of *shahādā*, of bearing witness and martyrdom,

Amila Butrovic writes:

Derived from the Arabic word meaning “seeing,” “witnessing,” and “testifying,” *shahada* connotes an ethical stance of witnessing truth and acting on it (Q2:185), including dying for it. In this way, *shahada* as death (as opposed to *shahada* in its other meanings) developed as a widely used and broadly understood concept, defined in both lay and political terms as martyrdom death associated with just causes. Such death possesses a markedly different quality and function, as enunciated in Q2:154: “And do not say for those who are killed for the cause of God that they are dead. Nay, they are alive, but you are not aware [of them].”<sup>397</sup>

It is this idea of *shahādā* that is involved in the Sufī call to “die before you die.”

Buturovic writes that “the Qur’anic passages that speak of a continuing relationship between the living and those who die striving in the path of God — understood, along al-Ghazālī’s more esoteric interpretation, as those who spiritually excel — are frequently evoked as the evidence that the visible and the invisible worlds do meet through the intercession of such holy individuals.”<sup>398</sup> The Qur’ān repeatedly declares that those who strive in the way of God live on even if they may not be physically present. The dead therefore have an intermediary function which is often extended to an intercessory function.

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<sup>395</sup> Amila Buturovic, “Death”, 132.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 139.

The Qur’ān also speaks of “the second death” by which “disbelievers are deprived of eternal life in the world to come.”<sup>399</sup> The Believers taste only the ‘first death’ which men suffer in this world (see Qur’an 44:50).<sup>400</sup> There is also the notion of Hell as a “living death” in some Qur’anic verses. Hell is a state where one encounters this second death.<sup>401</sup> As the Qur’an puts it in an ironic invitation to the wicked: “Do not call out today for one annihilating death, but (call out) again and again for annihilating death.”<sup>402</sup> Such an annihilating death is withheld. This idea of a complete destruction is often invoked in other Qur’anic verses by the verb *qaḍā* that means “to finish off completely,” which is something denied to the disbelievers.<sup>403</sup> There is a fixing of a time for every individual’s death (*qaddara*) and the accomplishment of this divine predetermination is called *qaḍā*.<sup>404</sup>

The form of life-beyond-death as a subject has received far more attention in the Islamic intellectual tradition than the theme of a dying before death. Let us return to the moment of death. Buturovic quotes from the Qur’an: “...the soul leaps to the throat; and you are then waiting; While We are closer to [the dead man] than you, but you do not see (Q56:83-85).”<sup>405</sup> Buturovic further adds:

While the corpse lies in the grave, the soul — *nafs* — is released and delivered to its Creator. Death, then, brings about a fragmentation of a human being that is reversed only at the resurrection. The integrity of an individual is restored after a long physical and metaphysical separation about which the Qur’an does not say much.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data*, 14.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>405</sup> Amila Buturovic, “Death” in Jamal J Elias, *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, 129.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*

But between death and the hereafter, the Islamic tradition introduces the intermediary condition developed out of the Qur'ānic concept of *barzakh*. *Barzakh*, located between death and resurrection, is a spatio-temporal hiatus that corresponds in the Qur'ān “to an eschatological waiting room, a transitional spacetime that prevents the dead from returning to this world on the one hand and forewarns them about their eschatological destination on the other.”<sup>407</sup> Between death and resurrection, a human soul enters this state of *barzakh*. *Barzakh* is, in other words, “the time every individual must wait between death and resurrection and the place or abode of that waiting.”<sup>408</sup>

Sufism transformed the Qur'ānic concept of death by rearticulating the “relationship between God, the dead and the living, as well as...body, spirit and soul”<sup>409</sup> through a voluntary dying, a dying before death, and, in certain moments, its rearticulation of the concept of *nafs* along the lines of Greek philosophy. The Sufi difference in the articulations of death can be traced back to the seminal text of al-Qushayri that reveals “a qualitative repositioning toward death in Sufi discourse and practice from the one associated with mainstream teachings.”<sup>410</sup> One such key repositioning is in relation to the *nafs*, which acquires in Sufism the meaning of ego/self, a subtle being, which is the locus of blameworthy traits in an individual as opposed to *sirr* (heart) or *ruh* (spirit) which is the locus of praiseworthy traits.<sup>411</sup> Buturovic writes of the Sufi *nafs*:

Conditioned by a desire to return to its Creator, the *nafs* experiences the separation as yearning and worship, and the union as the ultimate reward for the spiritual self-discipline and committed self-edification. Evoking the Prophet's dictum “Die before you die!” and the

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 8.

<sup>409</sup> Amila Buturovic, “Death”, 133.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

*mi'raj* (the Prophetic ascension story), whereby beatific visions are made possible through an interplay of God's grace on the one hand and a spiritual and ritual wayfaring on the other, the Sufis model the reunion in/with God as a momentary death that brings about a cessation of one's self in the divine self. The Sufis refer to this as voluntary death or self-annihilation, *fana fihi*, to be distinguished from the inevitable death willed by God. Like al-Hallaj who pleaded "Kill me, my faithful friends, for in my slaughter is my life — my death is in my life and my life is in my death," Sufis began to re-inscribe the categories of life and death in reference to one's spiritual enrichment and growth rather than impoverishment and loss.<sup>412</sup>

Buturovic also quotes Rumi: "The mystery of "Die before death" is this: After dying come the spoils."<sup>413</sup> There is also a certain parallelism between the mystical ascension, *mi'rāj* (in the Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad's ascension in a night journey to heaven), and death:

Mystical ascent, mimicking the *mi'raj* in spiritual terms, enables each committed disciple to taste death in qualitatively different terms, as a disappearance and relocation of the self thanks to which a new, more sublime identity can be fleetingly fashioned. Sufi ideas of death, then, substitute the conventional anxiety about dying with the possibility of imminent reward of intimacy with the divine, which, like physical death, is every bit singular and subjective as it is general and non-subjective.<sup>414</sup>

Even the idea of self-annihilation as a passing away, however, must go through stages.

Buturovic quotes Michael Sells' translation of the mystic Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910) writing about the steps, or stations, on the way to *fanā* (annihilation):

There are three passings away. The first is the passing away from the attributes, qualities and dispositions. This passing occurs through the performance in you of the proofs of your work, through expending effort, through your being at variance with yourself, through your confining of yourself by reprehending its desire.

The second is the passing away from attention to one's share of the sweet deserts and pleasures of obedience: through the perfect accord of the quest of the real for yourself in cutting you off from him; that there might be no intermediary between you and him.

The third passing away of yourself from the vision of reality: passing away from your ecstasies as the sign of the real overpowers you. At that moment you both pass away and abide, and are found truly existent in your passing away; through the found existence of your other; upon the abiding of your trace in the disappearance of your name.<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid. Buturovic adds: "The three steps to *fana* constitute a necessary and arduous process and it is understood to be the trademark of the death coveted by the aspiring soul rather than the death endured by the reluctant body. To the extent that such death is possible, the Sufis embrace psychological mortality as a primordial gift, once lost but then found, as articulated in the Qur'anic dictum that to God we "return" (not just "go") from this life. Variations on this wondrous — yet hard-to-come-by — experience of dying before dying permeate Sufi literature, both poetic and prosaic, informing the very core of the spiritual journey."

This *fanā* (annihilation) is not only difficult to come by but a mystery which depends on grace. It is also the end of all *‘ishq* (Love). Muḥasibī develops in Sufism a psychology around the idea of a spiritual preparation for death: the self arrives at a death which keeps withdrawing in transitions from states (*hāl*) to stations (*maqām*) leading up to annihilation (*fanā*) only to return to *baqā* (eternal perdurance). Dying existentially signifies a change in one’s mode of being. To “die before you die” is only possible across the threshold of a waiting. *Inna ‘llah ma‘a ‘l ṣābirīn* (Allah is with the Patient), reminds the Qur’ān. As Nund Rishi writes:

*Tsālun chue vuzmalu’ tu’ traṭē*  
*Tsālun chue mandnyen gatkār*  
*Tsālun parbatas karni atē*  
*Tsālun chue manz athas hyon nār*  
*Tsālun chue pān kadun graṭē*  
*Tsālun chue khyon veh tu’ gār*<sup>416</sup>

Patience is to endure thunder and lightning  
 Patience is a day of darkness  
 Patience is to move a mountain  
 Patience is to hold a fire in your palm  
 Patience is to be ground in a mill  
 Patience is to voluntarily drink poison

The theme of patience as a voluntary drinking of poison returns us to Plato’s *Phaedo* and to the complex genealogy of dying in the Islamic tradition. Waiting at the *dihlīz* (threshold), with or without Patience, for death or God, the discourse of death as a form of negative theology, in the words of Derrida, leaves you yet again “without ever going

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<sup>416</sup> Moti Lal Saqī, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 35.

away from you.”<sup>417</sup> In this Chapter, we have examined the significance of the call to “die before you die” in not only Nund Rishi’s Sufi ethics of self-transformation but also in the ways Sufism reinterprets Islamic eschatology. Such a turn away from the hereafter to an attention to a field of possible spiritual transformations in the present was bound to have political consequences. Todd LeRoy Perreira argues that the call to “die before you die” wasn’t merely a mystical formula in the Sufi tradition but a spiritual technology of the self.<sup>418</sup> Perreira argues that “dying” as a practice is in use across religious traditions where the transiency of life is turned into an opportunity for spiritual transformation. Death is seen then not as something that happens at the end of your life but a practice which must be renewed again and again in your life. This involves preparing for a death about which it is impossible to know anything. Learning to die was fundamental to the arts of living in late antiquity. To learn dying involved a search for the truth of being which, in turn, involved a transformation of the self. Perreira writes:

What accounts for the particular value of this exercise is the fact that not only must one’s entire life be thoroughly transformed but this process is integral to the moral life. Indeed, this is not simply a question of learning how to anticipate death, of being prepared for death, of attaining the proper state of mind at the moment of death, of understanding what happens when you die or after you die, or why you die, or even the hope of achieving a “good death” (*ars moriendi*) in the final moment of life. These are all, of course, immensely important concerns but, in actuality, they are the result of something far more fundamental: the widespread recognition that the scandal of death demands of one a transformation of the self as a living subject and moral agent.<sup>419</sup>

But there is a sense of urgency to this dying before death in the *shruks*. A comparative study of Islam and Buddhism reveals a shared history of thinking about spiritual death-

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<sup>417</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 85. The idea of the threshold, or *dihlīz*, and waiting at the *dihlīz*, appears powerfully in the work of the great medieval Islamic mystic and philosopher, Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī. See, for instance, Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the poetics of imagination* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 29-30.

<sup>418</sup> Todd LeRoy Perreira, “‘Die before you die’: Death Meditation as Spiritual Technology of the Self in Islam and Buddhism,” *The Muslim World* 100 (April/July 2010): 249.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

practices. Both Buddhism and Islam stress the transformation of self prior to death. Ignaz Goldziher had made a case for the strong influence of Buddhism on Sufism in his *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*.<sup>420</sup> Goldziher had even attributed such Sufi rituals to the influence of Buddhism as “the bestowing of the *khirqa*, that is, the piece of clothing that symbolizes the Sufi’s poverty and his flight from the world.”<sup>421</sup> The two religions also share the notion of a self that must “die” to itself before the event of physical death. But in “dying,” does the self reveal something about its nature? Perreira poses an even more difficult question: “What must one know about oneself in order to be willing to submit to a practice of dying before dying?”<sup>422</sup> It is helpful to compare Buddhist and Islamic asceticisms to gain a better understanding of the thinking and practice of the call to “to die before you die.”

Perreira turns to asceticism studies to juxtapose Gavin Flood’s general claim that asceticism as “a voluntary performance of tradition” is aimed at ““shaping the narrative of a life in accordance with the narrative of tradition” with the theory of Richard Valantasis that the ascetic “constructs an entirely new agency capable of functioning in a different and resistant way to the dominant culture that defines identity, personality, and social functions.”<sup>423</sup> Even though Nund Rishi’s asceticism exemplifies the voluntary performance of the mystical tendency in the Islamic tradition, the rise of Rishi asceticism can be better approached as a movement that was resistant to dominant theological

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<sup>420</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 141-3.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>422</sup> Todd LeRoy Perreira, “Die before you die,” 248.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

culture in medieval Kashmir. Perreira compares the death meditation practices of al-Ghazālī, a twelfth century Sufī, with analogous practices in the Buddhist tradition such as *asubha-bhāvanā* (meditation on the foulness of the body) and *maraṇasati* (mindfulness of death) in the Theravada Buddhist tradition. The theme of being “ensnared by attachments, delusions, and the pursuit of worldly desires” which is common to a Sufī such as al-Ghazālī and the Buddhist traditions dominates much of Nund Rishi’s *shruks*.<sup>424</sup> Even a Sufī figure as mindful of Islamic orthodoxy as Ghazālī had devised many death meditations as “a training for making death an actuality in one’s daily life.”<sup>425</sup> Al-Ghazālī, for instance, advocates lying in the position of a corpse in the bed, imagining the body as a corpse undergoing decay and remembering the friends who have died.<sup>426</sup> The idea was to instill a *dhawq* (literally, “tasting”) of one’s death. Al-Ghazālī speaks of techniques of meditation on death that often involved thinking of not only the death of the others but also of one’s own death.

A minute scrutiny of one’s own attitude to death is also central to Buddhist monasticism. In the Pali canon, it is Buddha’s encounter with a dead man that turns him to a life of asceticism (the story of the renunciation of the Buddha has strong echoes in Sufī tales of renunciation such as the story of Ibrahim bin Adham). In the Theravada Buddhist tradition, the initiation ceremony of a monk not only mirrors a symbolic death but the instruction that a monk receives largely consists of meditations on the body which initiates the process of “dying before dying.”<sup>427</sup> Much like the spiritual exercises of

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 257.

Ghazālī, a *bhikku*'s meditation also involves “visualizing a corpse undergoing various stages of decay and comparing this to one’s own body.”<sup>428</sup> The Buddhists, much like the Sufis, encouraged visits to cemeteries to cultivate mindfulness of one’s own death. Perreira spells out the key stake in “dying before dying”: “If the death that comes at the end of life is the death that separates us from one another, then the death that comes before death is the death that joins us to one another.”<sup>429</sup> “Dying before dying” then is not renunciation but the possibility of “arriving at a profound feeling of being more fully at home in the world” and to live without the fear of death.<sup>430</sup>

But even then the question remains: is it possible to experience dying before death? Perreira concludes: “Both Islamic Sufism and Theravāda Buddhism address this question by calling special attention to the evanescence of human existence and by linking this recognition to a demand for spiritual progress, not as a means of forestalling death, but to transmute the power of its reality into what is held to be a higher, more pure or virtuous life, a life rendered fearless in the face of finitude.”<sup>431</sup> For medieval Sufism, and clearly for Nund Rishi, it is the lower self, *nafs*, that must be annihilated in *fanā* (annihilation) so that the higher self may abide in the *baqā* (perdurance) of surrender. In the Buddhist tradition, “to ‘die’ before you die is to die to false notions of an enduring self.”<sup>432</sup> According to Perreira, dying before dying introduces two new forms of experience: “The first — that of introspection — appears to be linked to a new knowledge of how one/I/you/we should live our lives, while the other is primarily one of

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 260-61.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 262.

interrogation — the minute level of scrutiny required of one who goes to battle with his own demons.”<sup>433</sup> Nund Rishi’s call “to die before you die” can be then seen as a spiritual technology used across traditions for “understanding, defining, experiencing, and, ultimately, transforming the self in relation to the dominant culture that otherwise shapes one’s personal and social identity.”<sup>434</sup> The dominant culture in medieval Kashmir was a mix of the ideas and practices of the Brahman elites and the Persian Muslim immigrants. If the call ‘to die before you die’ was a call for an ascetic self-transformation, it was also a call for a political transformation. The way Nund Rishi connects self-transformation to political transformation is most obvious in the *shruks* that deal with the apocalyptic which I take up in the next chapter.

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>434</sup> Todd LeRoy Perreira, “‘Die before you die,’” 264.

## Chapter 4

### Vernacular Apocalypse

As apocalypticist I can imagine that the world will be destroyed. *I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is*: Jacob Taubes.<sup>435</sup>

*Hā hā aki sangar tār zan wazan  
Gunbad wazan dun dun kith  
So zan isharu' sāt̄yen bozan  
Ko zan bozan nu' ḍum ḍumu' gath*<sup>436</sup>

Yes, yes, the mountains will blow off like carder's wool off a string  
The domes resound with the blows  
The good shall recognize it from its signs  
The evil shall not even hear the revolutions of the drum

This is the *shruk* with which Rahman Rahi, Kashmiri poet and literary critic, begins his seminal essay *Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath* (The Poetic Personality of *Shaikh al 'Ālam*) on Nund Rishi. The *shruk*, symptomatic of Nund Rishi's apocalypticism, does not bear an immediate relation to Rahi's reading of Nund Rishi's thinking of death in much of the essay which is why its choice as the epigraph presses itself on the reader. As we have already seen in Chapter 3, there is a difference between 'dying' and 'death' which is the key not only to Rahi's reading of Nund Rishi but also to understanding the Sufi call to "die before you die" echoed in the *shruks*. But this *shruk* also reveals what remains unthought in, and yet is crucial to, Rahman Rahi's reading of Nund Rishi: *the apocalyptic tone in Nund Rishi's thinking of death*. In this Chapter, I'll argue that apocalypticism is fundamental to the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi. The crisis which we come upon in Nund Rishi's urgent insistence on the imminence of death not only

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<sup>435</sup> Quoted in Marin Terpstra and Theo deWit, "No Spiritual Investment In The World As It Is": Jacob Taubes's Negative Political Theology" in *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical perspectives on Negative Theology*, eds Ilse N Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 336.

<sup>436</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath" in *Kahvat: Tanqīdī mazmūnan ḥanz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 136.

anticipates the apocalyptic mode but turns into a waiting for the apocalypse.

The thinking of death in Nund Rishi is clearly cast in an Apocalyptic mould that gathers force in the distinctive use of Kashmiri stress patterns in sound figures fundamental to the *shruk*.<sup>437</sup> Nowhere is this as obvious as in the *shruk* quoted above which unveils what I call a vernacular apocalypse (or what is for Jacob Taubes “an apocalypse from below”).<sup>438</sup> Nund Rishi speaks of the day when the mountains blow off like wool from a carder’s string (*sangar tār zan wazan*) and the *gunbad* (domes of buildings, dwellings, tombs) tremble in fear. This is a powerful *shruk* that calls to mind not only the sheer strength of the imagery of the early Meccan revelations in the Qur’ān, which deal with the Apocalypse, but also the images of the end in the *bhakti* and the Sikh traditions. The image of mountains blowing off like wool from a carder’s string or the collapse of beautiful buildings are not only the traditional images of Islamic eschatology but also the core elements of Muslim apocalyptic literature. For example, the use of the dome as a symbol emerges in the Muslim historical Apocalypses in relation to the Dome of the Rock and the Temple at Jerusalem.<sup>439</sup> We must now turn to the last two lines of the *shruk*:

*So zan isharu’ sāt̄ȳen bozan*  
*Ko zan bozan nu’ ḍum ḍumu’ gath*

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<sup>437</sup> The metre of Kashmiri *vākhs* and *shruks* depends on stress-accent rather than syllabic quantity. Ranjit Hoskote writes in his Introduction to his translation of Lalla *vākhs*: “Unlike the metrical system used in North India, which is based on syllabic quantity, the measure of the Kashmiri song depended on a sequence of stress-accent.” Ranjit Hoskote, *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Dēd* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2011), li.

<sup>438</sup> See Joshua Robert Gold, “Jacob Taubes: ‘Apocalypse from Below,’” *Telos* no. 134 (2006): 141-2.

<sup>439</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2002), 54-55, 232. Cook adds: “It should be noted that the connections between the Dome of the Rock and the Temple are strong and well documented in the various praise compilations (*faḍā’il*) on Jerusalem... It should be noted, however, that it is by no means clear that the builders of the Dome (the Umayyads ‘Abd al-Malik and al-Walīd I) had this messianic concept in mind when they built it.” *Ibid.*

The good shall recognize it from its signs  
The evil shall not even hear the revolutions of the drum

Here the poet makes a moral distinction between the good and the evil which hinges on their relative competence in reading the signs of the Apocalypse. The good need merely a sign, an *isharu'*, to decipher the eschatological message but the evil do not even hear the imminent call of the End: the revolutions of the drum (*dum dumu' gath*). The *shruk* evokes Chapter 101 of the Qur'ān, Surah *Al-Qār'ia*, where the Apocalyptic emerges as the disappearance of the ground and the moment when the mountains blow off like wool from a carder's string. Like the Surah, the *shruk* begins in a hymnic mode with the repetition of similar sound units and, after evoking similes for ontological reversals at end times, turns to the scales of justice upon which human deeds are to be weighed. Michael Sells points out that the images from Surah *Al-Qār'ia* are "evocative of the inversion of strong and weak that is characteristic of the early revelations."<sup>440</sup> The ending of the *Surah* introduces a strange term *hawiya* as the fate of those whose scales weigh light on the Day of Judgment which Sells translates as "raging fire," but which can also mean "abyss" or "a woman bereft of her child."<sup>441</sup> Nund Rishi turns often to these figures of sudden human loss in the *shruks*. For instance:

*Talu' chuy zyus tu' pyethu' chuk natsān*  
*Wantu' māli vōndu' kithu' patsān chu'e*  
*Azāb-e qabras konu' chuk khotsān*  
*Daptu' māli an kithu' rotsān chu'e*<sup>442</sup>

There is an abyss at your feet and you dance over it

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<sup>440</sup> Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1999), 24-25.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>442</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 133.

Tell me, dear, how do you make this work?  
Why don't you fear the punishments of the grave?  
Tell me, dear son, how do you even digest your food?

Nund Rishi considers our very existence as a dance over an abyss. But life is somehow made possible by a forgetting. Yet Nund Rishi reminds his disciple (whom he addresses with affection as 'son') that this situation is so horrific that it should be impossible to even digest one's food.

Death and eschatology are fundamental themes in the Qur'ān as in the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi. The Qur'ān is an eschatological text and the early Qur'ānic revelations are clearly apocalyptic. Death appears in relation to the End in Nund Rishi in much the same way as it does in the Qur'ān. But in Nund Rishi, death opens out to a thinking of the apocalyptic that is also an inner event and does not merely represent the Day of Judgement (*al-Qiyāmah*). We will examine Nund Rishi's thinking of the apocalyptic in this Chapter as a vernacular apocalypse not only because it signals the appearance of an Islamic apocalypse in the Kashmiri vernacular but also because it emerges at this place on the periphery of the Islamic world (*dār al-Islām*). We will trace the structure of the apocalyptic in Nund Rishi back to the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic apocalypses (Abrahamic apocalypses), but marked by the difference the promise of which is its translatability. Both the relation, and difference, between the Abrahamic and the Kashmiri apocalyptic hinge on the question of the political. The apocalyptic reveals the link between poetry and politics at the threshold of language.

Apocalyptic vision often takes the form of poetic prophecy. What is the relation between poetry, prophecy, and the apocalyptic? William E. Franke elaborates upon the

meanings of the apocalypse in relation to poetry and prophecy in his *Poetry and*

*Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language:*

The essential matter of apocalypse is the revelation of the end of the world and the advent of eternity. This is tantamount to a glimpse of the divine vision, since the prophet assumes a supra-human viewpoint and in effect “speaks for” God—“pro-phetes,” from *fateor* (confess, bear witness to, acknowledge, reveal) plus *pro* (for, on behalf of, instead of). Apocalypse... in Greek, is literally an emergence “out of hiding.” The English translation “revelation,” based on the Latin *revelatio*, suggests an unveiling. “Apocalypse,” then, as the extreme development of prophecy means a disclosure of the end of human life and history.”<sup>443</sup>

The Apocalyptic remains indisassociable from the element of prophecy as it makes and preserves the connection between poetic revelation and the divine prophecy. The apocalyptic is always bound up with history. But the withdrawal of the classical apocalypse is perhaps one way of approaching the apocalyptic in our times. This withdrawal repeats itself in the shade of one or the other historical apocalypses. It could also be said that the apocalypses foretell events in order to shape the future.<sup>444</sup> As Franke puts it: “Prophetic visions, with their appeals for repentance, rather than just giving previews of a fate to be passively awaited, adumbrate guidelines for action to be carried out urgently in the present.”<sup>445</sup> The *shruks* of poetic prophecy have proliferated in everyday Kashmiri and offer a ruinous vision of the future. William E. Franke goes as far as to suggest that poetry is the condition of possibility of apocalyptic vision:

The limits to direct disclosure in language of any final and total truth are what make specifically poetry necessary as a means of expression for apocalyptic vision. Consequently, alongside apocalyptic theology, a negative theology is crucial for explaining the role of poetry as prophetic and apocalyptic, for poetry is precisely the veil that covers over and prevents total disclosure of what theological apocalypse in principle would reveal.<sup>446</sup>

Franke retains negative theology as a way of exploring the relationship between poetry

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<sup>443</sup> William Franke, *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language* (Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

and prophecy, but it is far from clear if negative theology unveils (or veils) the apocalyptic. If poetry is a form of revelation, then apocalypse is itself what remains hidden at the extremes of language: the abyss that threatens all language, a threat more originary than affirmations of negative theology, but without which no poetry is possible. As William Franke suggests, it is as if poetry and Apocalypse need each other.<sup>447</sup>

This intimacy between language and the abyss is brought home in Nund Rishi's following line from the *shruk* above: *Talu' chuy zyus tu' pyethu' chukh natsān* (There is an abyss at your feet and you dance over it). Poetry seeks to bring the apocalypse into language. As Franke puts it: "By seeing the end as occurring exemplarily and repeatedly within history itself, the apocalyptic poem attempts to realize the possibility of living in and from the revelation of the end, as well as of acting in accordance with its truth, and even of contributing to bringing about this final consummation."<sup>448</sup> The act of poetic creation itself often has the apocalypse as its ambition. Like the apocalypse it unravels, the poem hovers around the unrepresentable source of meaning that makes it possible in the first place. Franke writes:

Fundamentally, apocalyptic is radical openness to what is other than all that can be represented. The unrepresentable source of making, alias *poiesis*, from which all representations poetically emerge, cannot itself be represented as such, but it can always, volcanically, act up and manifest itself anew, and all representations can be reduced to naught and be contradicted and annihilated by the world-shattering, world-renewing event of *poiesis*. *Poiesis* is in this sense apocalypse, and so far as our experience of it can be conceptualized and communicated, apocalypse is *poiesis*, with the proviso that *poiesis* embraces not only the positive poetic moment of giving form, but equally the dissolution of form and the annihilation of all orders of representation.<sup>449</sup>

Is *poiesis* reducible to the apocalyptic alone? Or is the apocalyptic something

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 25.

radically different from *poiesis*. We discern here a resemblance between the discourse of negative theology and the apocalyptic poem. I would like to argue that unlike Franke it is perhaps better to read negative theology from the apocalyptic rather than the other way around: the opening of the future in the apocalypse unveils the stakes of the deferral of meaning in negative theology. But what of the apocalypse?

Rather than ignore the apocalyptic tone in Nund Rishi, I turn to it in order to unravel the meanings of the relations between negative theology, death and politics, in Nund Rishi's mystical poetry. It is to the apocalyptic tone in Nund Rishi that the contemporary Kashmiri discourse turns even as Kashmiri literary criticism has either sought to arrest the excesses of the apocalyptic or remains embarrassed about it.<sup>450</sup> The apocalyptic appears in Nund Rishi's poetry as coterminous with the fading away of traditions (which in itself founds the cornerstone of thinking the tradition in Kashmir). It is unwise, impossible even, to remain oblivious to the fact that a tradition was indeed fading away in Kashmir at the time Nund Rishi shaped the *shruk* as an apocalyptic poem. It would be useful to state at the beginning that neither millenarianism nor messianism appear explicitly as themes in Nund Rishi, but a political messianism is nonetheless inseparable from his thinking of the apocalyptic. What Jacob Taubes often maintained about Kierkegaard that Kierkegaard hoped to return to a Christianity as if no time had passed since the resurrection could also be said about Nund Rishi himself: he hoped to return to an Islam as if no time had passed since the life and death of the Prophet Muhammad.

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<sup>450</sup> I have here in mind the Kashmiri literary critics, Rahman Rahi, and Shafi Shauq. See Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath" in *Kahvat: Tanqīdī mazmūnan ḥanz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 129-30.

We began this chapter by noting that Rahman Rahi begins his essay on Nund Rishi by quoting an apocalyptic *shruk*. There is a moment in Rahman Rahi's essay where he turns his attention again to the apocalyptic tone in Nund Rishi and serially quotes five *shruks* in order to bring forth the cataclysmic movement of the apocalyptic there. Rahi's effort to establish Nund Rishi's poetic singularity in these five *shruks* also allows us to trace the movement of the apocalyptic in Nund Rishi's thinking of death. Each *shruk* is illustrated by Rahi with a brief comment, almost like a stage direction. Rahi invites us to look at what he calls the *tāndava*, or Shiva's divine dance of destruction, in the first

*shruk*:

*Sāhib dohu' aki dorāh kare*  
*Yath samsāras kari loru' pār*  
*Zamīn tu' āsmān pyen chari chare*  
*Na gatshyēs insāf na yiyas ār*<sup>451</sup>

One day the Master will decide  
 And shatter the world into pieces  
 The earth and the sky will scatter in different directions  
 Neither will he feel any justice nor any mercy

The apocalyptic images of the sky and the earth falling in bits and pieces as God neither has mercy (*ār*) nor forgiveness (*insāf*) for his creation are again Qur'ānic in origin. In Kashmiri, the word *insāf*, which means 'justice' carries the additional meaning of being moved to forgiveness in the compound verb *insāf yun* (to have mercy). Rahi then turns to the *pār pāv sūratihāl* (frightening situation) of the following *shruk*:

*Tati kyoho karakh roz-e maḥsharas*  
*Khāsan tu' āman āsi talvās*  
*Gabran palzan nu' māli tath qahras*  
*Morsal tu' nabī tati khyen trās*<sup>452</sup>

<sup>451</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath", 155.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

What would you do on the Day of Gathering?  
The day the rich are just as helpless as the poor  
The fathers cannot save their sons from that calamity  
Even the messengers and Prophets will be unavailing

Here Nund Rishi speaks of the helplessness of a human being on *roz-e mahshar* (Day of Gathering) when everyone must account for their lives. The Islamic warning that neither wealth nor genealogy (two things which mattered most in pre-Islamic Arabia) are able to rescue an individual on the Day of Judgement is repeated and sealed with the stark reminder that on the appointed day even God’s messengers and Prophets are going to find themselves helpless. Rahi then calls the “*ishq*” or love of the third *shruk a tratiy trāv waerdāth*, a catastrophic event:

*Ishq chuy mājiy kon pothar marun*  
*Ishq chuy kani tulariyeh byeb barun*  
*Ishq chuy tez kartaji tsanji darun*<sup>453</sup>

Love is the death of the only child for a mother  
Love is taking the beehive into your cloak  
Love is standing up to the blow of a sharp sword

Love is here read as nothing less than a figure of the Apocalypse: an overturning that shatters everything. Love is nothing less than the loss of a child for her mother, or to withstand a beehive in your cloak, or the blow of a sharp sword. Here love appears as an encounter with violence. This trope is consistent with such medieval Sufi concepts as *fanā* (nihilation) and *fanā al-fanā* (annihilation). The fourth example Rahi gives is the one he calls a *matsar boruth iztirāb*, a “mad complaint”:

*Nafsiy morus tu’ wāy*  
*Khāṭith rūdum gate*  
*Athi yiyhyem kyāy*

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

*Kartal tshu'nhas hate*<sup>454</sup>

My ego destroyed me  
It hides even now in the shadows  
If I could only get hold of it a while  
I would put a sword through its neck

Here the apocalyptic is revealed as the possibility of a decisive battle with the *nafs* (ego) which oppresses the self. Quite consistent with apocalyptic imagery, the sword appears in Nund Rishi's poems as a figure of self-transformation and decision. The violence of the previous *shruk* turns out to be inner and primordial. But in the last example of this cluster of *shruks*, Rahi introduces a faith (*yatsh patsh*) attuned to ecstasy (*shādmāni*) and bewilderment (*hārath*):

*Kalay karakh kalu'y wuzi*  
*Phule lagi Allah Hū*  
*Tsu'yoru' gatshakh su tor ruzi*  
*Dilay wuzi Allah Hū*<sup>455</sup>

If you turn to Him in attention  
Your mind will echo His Name  
You will be a flowering of *Allah Hū* (God is)  
Wherever you will go, He will be with You  
Your heart will resonate with *Allah Hū* (God is)

In this *shruk*, we witness remembrance incline the heart towards the divine which in turn inclines towards the self. We can trace in this set of *shruks* a movement through metaphor and similes, parables and symbols, from an apocalyptic eschatology to a Sufi askesis. Indeed we can argue that, for Nund Rishi, just as a thinking of death turns out to be about owning up to death in life, apocalypse too turns out to be a form of metanoia in inner space. Even though this idea of conversion isn't new in Sufi metaphysics, Nund

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 155-56.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 156. *Allah Hu* is a Sufi chant. The *Hu* is the desinence produced by the repeated chanting of *Allah-u* (God is) which often ends with invoking the divine name *al-Haqq* (the Truth).

Rishi's conversion retains a connection with a political reversal. Rahi writes that to reach this dance of expression, Nund Rishi turns to metaphor (*ist'āru*) and simile (*tashbīhu*), parable (*tamthīl*) and symbolism ('*alāmāth*), and deliberate images (*h̄yes angez shabīhu*).<sup>456</sup> Further he also writes that the critic P. N. Pushp is right in pointing out that the greatness of the *shruks* of Nund Rishi is in their concentration.<sup>457</sup> The apocalyptic in Nund Rishi remains undecidable between an eschatological event of traditional Islam, which is deferred to the future and the politico-ontological reversals of the apocalyptic in love, war, and prayer. The mystical poetry of Nund Rishi moves between these twin poles of apocalyptic eschatology and Sufi-Gnostic dialectics. The set of *shruks* Rahi quotes also mirror a movement from *fanā* (annihilation) to *baqā* (spiritual perdurance), *maqāms* (stages) in the spiritual journey of a Sufi, which in turn mediate the tensions between an ecstatic and a sober Sufism.

Let us turn now to a simple and economical definition Jacob Taubes offers us of the apocalyptic in his classic study of Western eschatology, *Occidental Eschatology*:

Apocalyptic means, in the literal and figurative sense, revelation. All apocalypse tells of the triumph of eternity. What is complete [*das Vollendete*] is glimpsed in the first sign, and what is glimpsed [*das Erschaute*] is boldly put into words in order to gesture ahead of time toward that which is not yet fulfilled. The triumph of eternity is played out on the stage of history. When, at the end of history, time, the Prince of Death, is overthrown, the *End Time* begins. The End Time is the end of time.<sup>458</sup>

The idea of the apocalypse is bound up then with a new idea of time, and death, in Western history. Jacob Taubes had hinted in an interview that in the “Western” (Taubes

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<sup>456</sup> Rahman Rahi, “*Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣīyath*”, 156.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, translated by David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.

calls it Occidental) thought, the Apocalypse breaks with cyclical time, something that has had deep and profound implications for human existence:

Whether one knows it or not is entirely irrelevant, whether one takes it for fancy or sees it as dangerous is completely uninteresting in the view of the intellectual breakthrough and the experience of time as respite [*daß Zeit Frist heißt*]. This has consequences for the economy, actually for all life. There is no eternal return, time does not enable nonchalance; rather, it is distress.<sup>459</sup>

We must then trace the beginnings of the Apocalyptic in the break with the cyclical time and the distress of linear time. In this early work, Taubes had already included Islam in his sense of the “Occidental” or “Western” eschatology. It is useful to mark here Nund Rishi’s difference from his older contemporary Lal Ded, a Shaivite mystic poet, who declares *Āsi ās tu’ āsi āsav* (We were and we shall remain) evoking an idea of a cyclical time.<sup>460</sup> The question of the Apocalyptic raises nothing less than the question of history posed from its outermost limit, of the *Eschaton*. Time, like life, runs in a straight, irreversible line in one direction.<sup>461</sup> As Taubes puts it: “The direction is always toward an end; otherwise, it would be directionless. The end is essentially Eschaton.”<sup>462</sup> For Taubes, time and history are inextricably linked and dependent on each other because of their common origin:

The origin of time and history is eternity. Just as history is the *interim* between eternity and eternity, so time is—if this is not too presumptuous—a stage of eternity, corresponding to that interim of history. Time emerges when the eternity of the origin is lost and the order of the world is gripped by death. The face of death is the sign of this world.<sup>463</sup>

The apocalyptic tone of Nund Rishi can be traced to this grip of the face of death over the world. Let us recall the *shruk* on death from Chapter 2:

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<sup>459</sup> David Ratmoko, “Preface” in Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, translated by David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), xiii

<sup>460</sup> J. L. Kaul, Lal Ded (Srinagar: Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 196.

<sup>461</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 4.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

*Kyāh tagi motas tu' motu' kyen kānan*  
*Kaman javānan chhāngu'r peyi*  
*Poni zan shrapey navyen bānan*  
*Vāni dith vānan phālav gayi*<sup>464</sup>

What can Death do or its ruses?  
Death shattered our youth  
The way water is absorbed by new clay vessels  
The way shops are abandoned at closing time

This is the face of death in the world: it is also the origin of time. There is a caesura in Nund Rishi's thinking of death and apocalypse, but a connection persists that unsettles not only death but also the Islamic eschaton. Apocalypses not only reveal the face of the world but also clear a space which turn the ends of history into a way of challenging the political limits of the world and anticipating a new life. As Franke puts it:

The implications of this existence projected upon the end of history are revolutionary. No longer need or ought one to live in a way conforming to this world, but rather in accordance with the new and fuller life to come.<sup>465</sup>

This has had profound implications for human history and is seen today in many places. Nund Rishi narrows the gap between the new and fuller life of the eschaton and the new and fuller life possible in the political present. The paradox about the apocalypse is that its engagement with the end of history is from the standpoint of the history of its own time. Franke draws our attention to this side of the apocalyptic: "It is necessarily engaged with the history of its time and expresses a total vision of universal history, but always from a particular angle and on the basis of its interpretation of the times rooted in its own historically specific experience."<sup>466</sup> The apocalyptic disclosure of truth is "an event within history, and yet also beyond history, closing it and giving it its final, 'true' sense."

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<sup>464</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath", 144.

<sup>465</sup> William Franke, *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language*, 13.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>467</sup> The essential content of the apocalyptic remains an interpretation of history even when it pushes beyond limits to “peer beyond it, to see the final end revealed already within it.”<sup>468</sup> Apocalypse is a reading of history into “a completed configuration of an end that reveals a divine purpose for all.”<sup>469</sup> But the poetic form of the apocalypse leaves the future of history open rather than closing it. Nund Rishi speaks of poetic revelation as an event from which it is difficult to escape, a relation that binds human life to mystery but is also a constant call to action:

*Dyen gāsh dyunthum vani kithu' gatu'  
 Babre langas vanu' soyi kāṭh  
 Diluk darwāzu' kithu' māli watu'  
 Ṣonas kithu' dimu' katsuk wāṭh  
 Khodāy dyūnṭhum kas māli khatu'  
 Jānas sāt chum jānas sangāṭh*<sup>470</sup>

I have seen the light of the day, how shall it fade?  
 How can I call sweet basil the stinging nettle?  
 How do I close the open doors of the heart?  
 How can I join the gold with glass?  
 I have seen God, how can I hide this from the others?  
 Life is joined after all to life

We must now situate the apocalyptic in its history to get a better sense of Nund

Rishi's apocalypticism. What is the apocalyptic in a strict sense? Franke writes:

“Apocalyptic” in the proper sense is a biblical or apocryphal literary genre that develops especially in the inter-testamental period, but it must also be understood more broadly as a mode of vision that views life as destined to convert into something utterly strange and different...Apocalyptic in this sense raises the issue of the ultimate groundlessness of all our own judgments through opening up beneath them the abyss of a judgment by which they are all to be judged: their partial perspective is then set to be measured against a whole vision and absolute standard.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>470</sup> Rahman Rahi, “*Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath*”, 142. Amin Kamil gives the second line as *Babre langas dapu' soyi kāṭh*. See Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu*, 252.

<sup>471</sup> William Franke, *Poetry and Apocalypse : theological disclosures of poetic language*, 91.

The Book of Daniel and the Revelation of John are key texts here, but one could easily include Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the genre. There may not be an explicit millenarianism or messianism in Nund Rishi, but the turn to an apocalyptic reversal is unmistakable.

What does apocalypticism seek to reverse? What is pivotal to such a turn in the apocalyptic? What relation does apocalypticism bear to questions of political power?

Taubes considers freedom to be the fundamental theme of apocalypticism:

The question of freedom is the fundamental theme in apocalypticism, and all of its motifs point to the turning point, when the structure of this world prison will burst apart. This turn does not refer in the first instance, or exclusively, to the existing social order. Apocalypticism is not at first concerned with changing the structure of society, but directs its gaze away from this world. If revolution were to mean only replacing an existing society with a better one, then the connection between apocalypticism and revolution is not evident. But if revolution means opposing the totality of this world with a new totality that comprehensively founds anew in the way that it negates [*neu stiftet wie sie verneint*], namely, in terms of the basic foundations, then apocalypticism is by nature revolutionary.<sup>472</sup>

The apocalyptists such as Nund Rishi are revolutionary because they opposed the totality of the medieval Kashmiri world with a new totality: Rishism as a political movement.

Nund Rishi turns to Islam's unknown, unseen God as the turning point, or pivot, of such a revolution. The Qur'ān is the trace of the totally Other from which this (re)turn must begin and which makes it possible. But such a movement is paradoxically taking place through a reliance on Hindu-Buddhist concepts such as *Shiva* and *Shunya*. But how is Nund Rishi's end any different from traditional Islamic eschatological expectation of the end? As Taubes puts it: "Apocalypticism is revolutionary because it beholds the turning point not in some indeterminate future but entirely proximate. Apocalyptic prophecy thus focuses on the future and yet is fully set in the present."<sup>473</sup> Nund Rishi brings the Islamic *Eschaton* uncomfortably near to political structures of his time. This unsettled the

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<sup>472</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 9.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

*Shahmīrī* rulers of his time, leading up to a tense relationship between the new medieval Islamic Sultanate and Nund Rishi (that includes not only his arrest but can also be traced in the *shruks* involving the legendary encounter with *Yāvan Māts*). The legend has it that some enemies of Nund Rishi sent *Yāvan Māts*, a beautiful Kashmiri dancer, to seduce Nund Rishi but she, in turn, was converted by Nund Rishi to Islam and became one of his disciples. By changing just one vowel, Nund Rishi puns on her name (*Yāvan Māts*) in his address to her:

*Yāvan Mātsī Yavan Mōtsī*<sup>474</sup>

*Yāvan Mātsī*, your youth shall shrink (*mōtsī*)

According to legend, this event had taken place when Nund Rishi was passing through Srinagar. Such apocryphal stories and legends give us evidence of a strong tension between the ruling classes and Nund Rishi. It is clear, as we shall see in the next Chapter, that it is the *mullāhs* (the clergy) that Nund Rishi singles out for attack from the ruling classes. The paradox of this situation takes us back to the crisis at the heart of early Islamic history between messianic hope and worldly ambition. In one of the few references to Islam in *Occidental Eschatology*, Jacob Taubes precisely draws attention to this paradox:

According to an early Islamic viewpoint, God alone is worthy of having dominion over mankind. A human *mulk*, a monarchy, would be anti-God. Even at the time of the Abassid, the caliphate's lawyers had to seek refuge in legal fiction to reconcile the concept of a hereditary monarchy with feelings deeply embedded in the nation's consciousness.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> *Yāvan Mātsī* is also addressed in a long narrative poem of *shruks* in the Nund Rishi corpus. See Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 185.

<sup>475</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 9.

Nund Rishi is not only aware of this paradox in Islamic history but makes full use of it in his apocalyptic poems. The apocalyptic view conceives of freedom from earthly ties so as to be in a covenant with God. As Jacob Taubes puts it: “Theocracy is built upon the anarchic elements in Israel’s soul. It expresses the human desire to be free from all human, earthly ties and to be in covenant with God. The first tremors of eschatology can be traced to this dispute over divine or earthly rule.”<sup>476</sup>

It is perhaps easier to see now what disturbs Nund Rishi about *vāndar rāj* (the rule of the beasts) which he invokes in one of his *shruks* that remains popular in Kashmiri cultural memory and is still hurled against existing political structures:

*Teli māli āsan tithī keran*  
*Tang tsūnth papan tseran sū’t*  
*Māji korī karith athu’vās neran*  
*Doh dyen baran gāran sū’t*  
*Khosh yi haqas dunyā lūrun*  
*Su hā māli āsi vāndar rāj*<sup>477</sup>

The signs of the times shall be so  
The pear and apple shall ripen at the same time as cherries  
The mother and the daughter shall go out hand in hand  
To spend their days with strangers  
It is then that the Real One shall destroy the world  
It will be the time of the rule of the beasts

The conservative, even misogynist, tone of the *shruk* about *vāndar rāj* suggests that it could also be a later interpolation. But nonetheless moral “chaos” has always been a sign of the Apocalypse in Muslim historical apocalypses. Here, in these *shruks*, the pre-

<sup>476</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 9.

<sup>477</sup> Asadullah Afaqi, *Ā’inā-e Haq: Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Life Foundation, 2008), 362. This *shruk* is given in a slight variation in Amin Kamil’s *Nūrnāmu’*. See Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu’* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 274. This *shruk* is given in Afaqi’s collection of Nund Rishi’s mystical poetry as a part of a longer narrative poem with the refrain, *Su hā māli āsi vāndar rāj* (It will be the time of the rule of the beasts).

Apocalypse society is represented as deviant and the secular sovereignty denounced as “the rule of the beasts.” The apocalyptic is a time of reversals even in the order of nature:

*Kāvi kh̄yei gūj tu' kān satu'tis*  
*N̄yepūtis marun pyo kande*  
*Brār su'nz lor peyi kokar pūtis*  
*Ut̄ni balāyi tutis vyende*<sup>478</sup>

The crow will eat the kernel of the fruit  
But the arrow will hit the hoopoe  
The speechless bird shall pay with her life  
The stick to beat the cat falls on the nestling  
Someone else pays for someone else's sins

The phrase *Ut̄ni balāyi tut* has passed into Kashmiri language and is used in every instance when an innocent person pays for someone else's mistake. Here the relation with the political is unmistakable: the weak and the vulnerable pay for the sins of the strong. The time is ripe for an apocalyptic reversal.

The apocalyptists see themselves in the situation of Abraham: nomads just passing through the world.<sup>479</sup> The beginnings of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic eschatology go back to the tension between an earthly but godless world and an otherworldly but God-centric end. As Taubes puts it: “The contradiction between the reality of the godless world and the idea of the Kingdom of God in the world brings forth eschatology.”<sup>480</sup> But Nund Rishi does not merely fashion a popular eschatology driven by political ends but turns to the radical thrust of Islamic eschatology whose energies are bound by the Islamic canon. The Prophetic eschatology does not merely announce the imminence of the end, it also denounces and devalues the present.

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<sup>478</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 282.

<sup>479</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 17.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Prophetic eschatology, with its definite imminence, differs from the vague indefiniteness of popular eschatology, which does not affect daily life. In prophecy disaster is near at hand; in the belief that the world is coming to an end, prophecy devalues the life and ways of this world.<sup>481</sup>

It is the Sufis who persisted in a mystical eschatology with deep connections to prophetic eschatology. What were the original linguistic elements which were used to fashion apocalypticism? What are the “base words” of apocalypticism? The first such word taken up by Taubes is alienation. As Taubes puts it: “The theme of self-alienation is to be heard for the first time in the context of apocalypticism.”<sup>482</sup> This theme of alienation runs through history in Kashmiri Sufi poetry: no Kashmiri mystic is in harmony with the world. But there is still hope for salvation: history. As Taubes writes: “History is the *path* of light into the world, through the world and out of the world.”<sup>483</sup> What is the purpose of such a historical understanding of self-alienation? The common ground between Mandaeans, Marcionites (Gnostics) and Neoplatonists is “God’s alienation from the world, and the resulting self-alienation experienced by mankind.”<sup>484</sup> If the theme was originally Hindu-Buddhist, it certainly persists in the Kashmiri mystical tradition. Here it might also be pertinent to raise the question if at all one should approach the different apocalypticisms from a common or a comparative standpoint. Taubes writes:

In Islam, too, the proclamation of a mission is the call, while the missionary is the one who calls. In this way, Mandaean, Manichaean, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religion belong together. They share the common foundation of apocalypticism. The elements which constitute the foundations of apocalypticism are the symbols of calling and hearing.<sup>485</sup>

One must now respond to the call of a God from whom one is alienated or one must call upon a God who is alienated from the world. Nund Rishi is constantly calling

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid, 26..

<sup>483</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid, 31.

and urging his readers to hear. In the last two lines of the *shruk* with which we began this chapter, we come across the verb *bozun*, to hear (or, to consider). *Why would then they not hear?* In a rhetorical turn reminiscent of Qur’ānic eschatology, Nund Rishi repeatedly asks why the message of salvation is not being accepted. There are also some other base words which we can briefly discuss which make the apocalyptic themes more accessible to us. Not only in Nund Rishi but through much of the Kashmiri Sufi tradition, one comes across the words, *yati* (here), and, *tati* (there). For instance, consider the following line from a *shruk*: *Yati ti mye tsai tati tu’ mye tsai* (Here and there: you alone are sufficient for me). Or in the longer poem with the refrain, *Har tati maṭu’ mye zam dito* (Do not bring me shame there, my God!). Jacob Taubes writes:

The base words *this* and *that* in relation to world are a further symbol of apocalypticism and are closely linked with the theme of self-alienation. The differentiation between “this” and “that” world already implies a valuation.<sup>486</sup>

This and that. *Dunyā* and *al-ākhirā*. Here and There. Yet it is the question of the when of the apocalypse which is the most urgent one. The question of the Now. It is here that the apocalyptic structurally resembles the existential standpoint:

The paramount question posed in the Apocalypse is *when?* The question arises from the pressing expectation of redemption, and the obvious answer is *soon*. Imminence is an essential feature of Apocalyptic belief.<sup>487</sup>

We have already seen that this sense of imminence is already there in Nund Rishi’s thinking of death. But it is also a sign of the weakness of the apocalyptic: the sense of imminence loses its power and appeal over time as the force of the apocalyptic fades away. But the question of the imminence of one’s own death opens out a different approach to the question of the apocalyptic. Here more than one’s own fate, it is also that

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<sup>486</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid, 32.

of the world, and the community as a whole which is at stake. The apocalyptic gives form and meaning to death. The gap between death and apocalypse is now narrow, like the bridge of *Sirāt* over Hell in the Islamic tradition, the gap that separates my “here” from everyone’s “there.” Al-Ghazālī quotes a Prophetic tradition which attests to this in which someone who has died is supposed to have gone through his apocalypse.<sup>488</sup> The thinking of the apocalyptic is not only the thinking of the last things but the thinking of the last man. The end is imminent. It is this imminence of the end that connects the existential concept of death to the thinking of the end times in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. As Michael Sells points out, it is the imminence of the Day of Judgment that gives many of the early Qur’ānic revelations about the Apocalypse their power: “What gives the early Meccan Suras their depth, psychological subtlety, texture, and tone is the way the future is collapsed into the present; the way the day of reckoning is transferred from the fear and hope of a moment in the future to a sense of reckoning in the present moment.”<sup>489</sup> Sells adds: “Rather than limiting themselves to describing a future event (promise and threat), these passages make present the event in question.”<sup>490</sup>

The apocalyptic is also the possibility that my death is going to be the last death. In Islam, a hiatus separates the first death from the second death (the resurrection) called the *barzakh*. And as Taubes reminds us:

And, at the end, “the times hasten more rapidly than previous times; the seasons speed by more quickly than in the past, the years disappear more swiftly than they do now.”  
Apocalypticism reveals knowledge of what in time is like crisis [*das Krisenhafte der Zeit*].

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<sup>488</sup> William C. Chittick, “Eschatology” in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Routledge, 1987), 398.

<sup>489</sup> Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’ān: The Early Revelations*, 24.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Time appears as a stream, springing from the eternity of creation; after descending various gradients, it pours into the sea of eternity and redemption.<sup>491</sup>

It is the possibility of total transformation which is at stake in the imminence of the End.

Both messianism and millennialism, as stated above, play an insignificant role in the *shruks*. But for all its insistence on the imminence of the end, the apocalyptist does not necessarily hasten the end. Sometimes the apocalyptist may even choose a passive political attitude. Perhaps it is for this reason that the apocalyptic emerges in times of historical crisis for people and in places where there is hope against hope. The apocalypics, in other words, emerge in a relation with the political but are not always necessarily political. Taubes writes of this political passivity of the apocalyptic in some instances:

The science of apocalypticism presupposes a passive attitude toward the happenings of history. There is an absence of action. The fate of world history is predetermined and there is no sense in trying to resist it. The passive voice predominates in apocalyptic style. In the apocalypses, no one “acts” but rather everything “happens.” It does not say that God hears the crying, but that the crying comes unto God; not that the Messiah judges the nations, but that there is a judgment of the people.<sup>492</sup>

There is a tension in the apocalypics between a political passivity and a political rebellion that remains undecidable, but nonetheless a political attitude is unmistakable.

The passivity is signalled by Nund Rishi in relation to a fundamental helplessness in relation to death. Yet the apocalypists who turn their backs on the world hope to agitate the world even as they embrace a radical passivity.

Let us consider Jacob Taubes’ outline of the structure of an apocalyptic discourse:

The belief in providence, the outline of world history, the cosmic horizon against which world history is set, the scope and dreamlike nature [*Phantastik*] of the visions, the concealment of the writer, the seething eschatology, the computations of the End Time, the apocalyptic science, the symbolism of numbers and secret language, the doctrine of angels

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<sup>491</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 34.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*

and the hope for an afterlife—all are elements which determine the structure of an apocalypse.<sup>493</sup>

All the core nuclear elements of eschatology – dreamlike visions, horrific imagery and the imminence and nearness of the Hour of the End – are to be found in one or the other *shruks* of Nund Rishi. But other elements, such as symbolism of messianic Sufis such as the *Hurūfīs*, or the mysticism of numbers of Jewish messianism, is absent here. For its strict resonance with the Qur’ān, one can even call Nund Rishi’s vernacular apocalypse a Qur’ānic apocalyptic. But one thing which is barely concealed in the *shruks* themselves but emerges from the surrounding historical evidence is the political purpose of Nund Rishi’s Qur’ānic apocalyptic. As I hinted above, there is a long history of connections between political rebellion and the apocalyptic as a genre. The first Apocalypse of Daniel in the Bible appears in relation to the rebellion against the Greek King Antiochus Epiphanes’ machinations against the Romans.<sup>494</sup> Even though Daniel speaks of the end of tyrannical rule of such figures as Nebuchadnezzar, Taubes reminds us that: “the narratives about earlier rulers, their arrogance and fall, was supposed to hint at what was in store for Antiochus and so strengthen the beliefs of the persecuted.”<sup>495</sup> Nund Rishi speaks of the imperial hubris of Alexander in relation to the transitoriness of human life:

*Rāj kor sikandaru’ tāj dāran*  
*Taem kunh māl nyū ratim saet*  
*Dil dith tshond di nīlū’ mazāran*  
*Asi bronth āsi hī gāmit kū’ t*<sup>496</sup>

The rule of Alexander was majestic

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>496</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu’*, 132.

But he left the world with empty hands  
Go and mindfully search the lush graveyards  
How many like us have passed before us?

This is how Taubes reads the struggle between the Romans and the Zealots soon after the rise of the Roman power:

Two world principles clashed in this tenacious, even desperate, struggle between the Zealots and the Romans. This may not have been their first confrontation but it was for the first time that they were fully aware of the nature of the conflict [*Gegensatz*]: the global empire of masters against a world revolution of the oppressed.<sup>497</sup>

For Jacob Taubes, St. Paul epitomizes a political possibility which we could use as one way of approaching Nund Rishi's negative theology as neither a political theology or a negative theology but a *negative political theology*. Marin Terpstra and Theo De Wit in an essay "*No Spiritual Investment in the World as it is*": *Jacob Taubes' Negative Political Theology* characterize Taubes' thinking as a form of negative political theology in a tradition running from St. Paul and St. Augustine to Martin Luther. Marin Terpstra and Theo De Wit suggest that negative political theology is a position within political theology for which Taubes draws on St. Paul. Terpstra and De Wit further write that "according to Taubes, Paul's political theological intervention was not directed toward establishing a different political system or replacing a political regime through political revolution. His effort opened a more radical possibility: a theological *delegitimation* of all political power as a political *attitude*."<sup>498</sup> The political alternative Taubes proposes is "an apocalyptic political attitude marked by detachment from every existing order and the

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<sup>497</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 45.

<sup>498</sup> Marin Terpstra and Theo de Wit, "No Spiritual Investment in the World As It Is': Jacob Taubes's Negative Political Theology," in *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*, eds. Ilse N Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 324.

messianic expectation of the revolutionary interruption of history.”<sup>499</sup> A study of Nund Rishi along these lines reveals how difficult it is to delimit the detachment towards an existing political order from revolutionary hope. It is inevitable then to see Nund Rishi’s eschatological concerns and apocalyptic tone as bound up with his concerns about the oppressed in medieval Kashmir. Nowhere is this as evident as in the popular *shruk* which we have already encountered in Chapter 2:

*Khānan handyen yiman robe khānan*  
*Jānan dapān apāri gatsh*  
*Sōndru’ vuchmakh harvakh nāvan*  
*Tsamro sāt̄yēn duvān latsh*  
*Tāth māli dīthu’ m kapas bovan*  
*Nasru’ mye vuch tu’ tsu’ vuchni gatsh*<sup>500</sup>

These intimidating residences of the rich  
The moment they see you, they turn you away  
I see beautiful women singing in those palaces  
And dust being swept with chowries  
The same residences are there no longer  
People now grow cotton over there  
I have seen all this, Nasr, you go and see.

Now, if we reread this *shruk* with the one with which we began this chapter, we can clearly understand some of the resonances of Nund Rishi’s apocalyptic tone. The cataclysm announced in the first *shruk* bears a relation to the political situation that appears in the *shruk* cited above. But in this *shruk*, it is the ruination of time that destroys the iniquities of a political order. The fourteenth century was an extremely turbulent period in Kashmiri history which began with the Mongol incursions into Kashmir that eventually brought the first Muslim dynasty to power in 1339 (even though, in the 1320s, Kashmir’s ruler Rinchan Shah converted to Islam and became the first Muslim ruler of

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>500</sup> Rahman Rahi, “*Shaikh al ‘Ālam sanz shā’irānā ḥaṣiyath*”, 146.

Kashmir). These disturbances were chaotic and we have historical evidence of the rise in tensions among different social groups. The conditions were bleak and Nund Rishi's evangelical message must be understood in the political register as a message of political salvation, a proto-communism. Nund Rishi released the revolutionary potentiality of an apocalyptic Islam at a time of great political instability in Kashmir. This is precisely how Taubes reads the revolt of the Zealots against the Romans:

The demonic often breaks through, as if an epidemic, and takes control of an area of the world. There is no doubt that, at the time of Jesus, there was a demonic outbreak which broke like a wave over the eastern area of the Mediterranean. Therefore, the message of the Kingdom of God is, in a special sense, an *evangelion*, a *message of salvation*, of healing [*Heils-botshaft*].<sup>501</sup>

The fourteenth century brought the demonic, earth-shaking, experience of the Apocalypse, the expectation of an imminent and violent end to the world, into an area which had been pulverized by the Mongols. The topsy-turviness of the world is a constant theme in Nund Rishi and has a strong Apocalyptic resonance. It is the *shruks* that deal with such topsy-turviness that remain most popular among Kashmiris as these verses still perform a strong social and religious critique. No doubt their popularity has meant that the sub-genre has expanded because of later interpolations. Their popularity is no guarantee, however, that this is not because of the uses to which a prophecy could be put, as is the case with much of the historical Muslim apocalypses.<sup>502</sup> But what is more interesting for us is the work that such *shruks* accomplish: the work of a reversal, or return. The topsy-turviness of the world in some of Nund Rishi's *shruks* is a hope for a

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<sup>501</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 51.

<sup>502</sup> I use the term historical apocalypses in a heuristic sense, following David Cook, who distinguishes it from other subgenres such as the metahistorical, messianic, Shī'ī, moral and Qur'anic apocalypses. See David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, 2002).

reversal, a reversal anticipated in Jesus's: "The last will be first, and the first last."<sup>503</sup> The apocalyptic is about this hope. Perhaps it is about this hope more than anything else.

It is already clear that what matters in the apocalyptic is the fate of human beings. We see the Rishis establish centres of Rishi thinking and practice all over Kashmir. They travel across Kashmir, and, as is apparent from the following *shruk* (where Nund Rishi speaks of having been turned away from their doors by most Kashmiris), do not necessarily always receive hospitality:

*Kashīri phyūrus ānde ānde*  
*Kānsi ne vucrum brānde trāv*  
*Jandas yali karim pāvandu'*  
*Adu' dopham fandu'e āv*<sup>504</sup>

I have been to every place in Kashmir  
Not even one household invited me in!  
When I patched my torn clothes  
I was accused of being a fraud

The apocalyptic discourse of Nund Rishi then also needs to be read in relation to his creation of a new community of the Rishis who in turn established themselves in different regions of Kashmir. Nund Rishi's thinking is in relation to the logic of imminence in a double sense: the imminence of death and the imminence of the Apocalypse. But this Apocalypse was already seen as coming in the living of the new order: its extreme asceticism and practices of self-transformation. The Rishi Order was the waiting for a return that begins with death and there was no better way to prepare for dying but to "die before you die." There is also a clear sense in Nund Rishi that the coming Hour is also

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<sup>503</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 51.

<sup>504</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 75. Saqi gives this as a set of two *shruks*. I have just quoted the first *shruk* which is more widely quoted.

going to bring the unjust social order to an end. Let us take, for instance, the following

*shruk*:

*Kentsan hatu' baḍ dānik kuchan*  
*An kuchan zag kyāv choto*  
*Kentsan vye natu' moṣom buchan*  
*Pānu' āshan kas kyā dītō*<sup>505</sup>

Some have granaries of rice  
Of various kinds: red and white  
Some lack even a daily meal for their little children  
Only He knows what he gives to whom

There are many *shruks* like this in the Nund Rishi corpus where the poet expresses a deep dissatisfaction with social inequality. As Taubes put it in relation to the early community around Jesus: “There is a clear connection between the enthusiasm for the Kingdom [of God] and communism.”<sup>506</sup> The Apocalyptic clearly invokes a time of imminent revolution: the end of the world as it is and its remaking after a final judgment.

It is not necessary that the apocalyptic movements are always necessarily revolutionary. The apocalyptic movements may also turn out to be conservative. Political messianism is the apocalyptic at its most revolutionary. In an essay that deals with messianism, millennialism, and revolution in Islamic history, Said Amir Arjomand writes about the relations between the apocalyptic and the political:

The apocalyptic worldview is compatible with revolutionary as well as quietistic political attitudes, with militancy as well as pacifism. Political messianism, on the other hand, inevitably motivates militant activism. The apocalyptic view of politics is particularly appropriate for the moment of revolutionary liminality, and can supply a powerful stimulus to what has been called ‘absolute politics’, when no boundaries are set to the political will and every aspect of the social order is seen as transformable by political action...By holding up the vision of the complete social and political transformation at an imminent point in history, political messianism generates a powerful motivation for absolute political action

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<sup>505</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam*, 182.

<sup>506</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 67.

aiming at the destruction and reconstruction of the political order.<sup>507</sup>

It needs to be remembered that the “absolute politics” of the apocalypticist becomes possible in Kashmir in relation to the rise of the “absolutist politics” of the new medieval State. Yet one could just as easily argue that most of Nund Rishi’s *shruks* are not about the destruction and reconstruction of the political order but about an inner purification, a turn or return to God. Nund Rishi’s call to metanoia nonetheless had an explicit political dimension. We have already seen in the Introduction that Nund Rishi was arrested by Sultan Sikandar and one of his closest disciples Baba Zain al-Dīn Rishi was sent into exile in Tibet. The legends around the dialogue between the son of Mīr Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī, Mīr Muḥammad Hamadānī on the one hand, and Nund Rishi and his women disciples on the other, also bear witness to these tensions between the dominant theologico-political order and Nund Rishi’s religio-political movement.<sup>508</sup>

Apocalypse and apocalyptic disclosure makes everyone uneasy. But Nund Rishi does not turn to all the elements of a Muslim Apocalyptic. For instance, he does not speak of the Second Coming of the Christ (even though *parousia* is a belief in traditional Islam) or the coming of the Mehdi (or Muslim Messiah). Let us return to Taubes again for an understanding of Jesus’s ministry for clues to understanding these political dimensions of Nund Rishi’s apocalyptic:

The *metanoia* which the messengers of Jesus are to preach is not a message of repentance intended purely to provoke inner remorse. The disciples go throughout the land and with their *schuwu*, their “turn around,” [*kehret um*], demand an *act* which turns human life upside down [*grundlegend umstürzt*]. To give up all that you possess means selling your possessions and distributing them to the poor brethren; it means denying yourself, taking up

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<sup>507</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, “Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History,” in *Imagining the End*, edited by Abbas Amanat and Magnus Berhardsson (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2002), 108.

<sup>508</sup> There is a detailed discussion of these episodes from Nund Rishi’s life in Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The role of Muslim Rishis* (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 1994).

the Cross, which is the sign of Cain, wandering restlessly without a home, and following Jesus as lord and master.<sup>509</sup>

The royal Mughal chroniclers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century describe the Rishis of Kashmir as just such a community. The disciples of Nund Rishi go throughout the land and relentlessly demand an act which would turn human life upside down. The conversion to Islam thus acquires a more complex meaning, as some leading disciples of Nund Rishi do not merely enter the fold of Islam but also leave behind lives of privilege, knowledge, and wealth in the old order to prepare for a more fundamental transformation of self and society. The overturning they call for goes beyond a simple conversion, as the disciples also reject the Sufi theology of an emerging urban Muslim cosmopolitanism in Srinagar with as equal a vehemence as they reject their own older beliefs. Taubes points out that Chiliasm in early Christianity was largely supported by lower social orders.<sup>510</sup> The Rishi movement was far from a Chiliastic movement but it was certainly popular, and remains popular among the Kashmiri peasant and subaltern classes. The Rishi movement remains connected to the Kashmiri peasant in much the same way the chiliastic movements of medieval Europe are connected to peasant rebellions. The strong denunciation of the rich, of the elites of Kashmir, the discomfort with a narrow and legalistic interpretation of the Qur'ān, and Nund Rishi's subsequent arrest, all point in this direction. This is also a dominant theme in the early Meccan Surahs of the Qur'ān, which deal with the Muslim Apocalyptic. Michael Sells writes:

The early Meccan Suras, for example, repeat the idea that human beings attempt to ignore their mortality through incessant acquisition and competition (*takāthur*). By acquiring things, the Quraysh of Mecca—and by extension all humans—are led to think that their acquisitions will make them immortal. The Qur'anic reminders concerning acquisitiveness focus on the

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<sup>509</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 54-55.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

moment of final realization of what well-being, plenitude, or the true “good life” (*an-na‘im*) really is—a moment of reckoning when the goods one has grasped will be of no worth.<sup>511</sup>

In his interpretive commentary on Surah 104, Michael Sells argues that Islamic eschatology makes itself incompatible with modern capitalism: “However one interprets the fire—as a reified place in the afterlife or as a metaphor for the painful realization of a wasted life—the Qur’ān’s condemnation of acquisition has raised and continues to raise, questions about the compatibility of Islamic faith with the more fiercely competitive aspects of free enterprise capitalism.”<sup>512</sup> Even though one finds some connections between Sufism and pietistic Islam among the working classes in nineteenth century Kashmir and sporadic political rebellions, our scant historical understanding of peasant history in Kashmir does not offer more detailed clues for a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Rishi movement and the Kashmiri peasantry. The way medieval European sectarian movements turned to the freedom and equality of early Christian community, the rebellion of Sufi Orders, and the Sunni (or Shī‘ī) apocalyptic and messianic movements, also often invoke the freedom and equality of early Islamic communities bypassing the State and the networks of clergy (*ula’mā*) or more traditional Sufi Orders close to political power such as the *Naqshbandiyyā* or the *Suhrawardiyyā*. We shall examine these intra-Sufi tensions and controversies in Kashmir, and their contemporary resonances, in greater detail in the next Chapter.

Scholars of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have pointed out the connection between the rise of Apocalypics and the ruptures in social fabric caused by socio-political turbulence. In Judaism, the apocalypics were relegated to a mysticism for which

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<sup>511</sup> Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’ān: The Early Revelations*, 115.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

Mishnaic and Talmudic rabbinism had no use. The apocalypticism of Kashmiri Rishism also emerges and develops in relation to a conflict with the priestly classes of the new Muslim society in Kashmir. The criticism of the priests was also the theme of early Jewish apocalypses as the question of standards for priesthood became a central one in Jewish life. This tendency persists in the Muslim apocalyptic, where political power and religious orthodoxy often come in for sharp criticism. But the intent of many of the more political Sufi movements such as the Rishi movement was not merely a return to the ideals of early Islam but also the coming of a revolution (which was indissociable in their imagination and discourse from divine justice). This is the reason why the Second Coming of Jesus remains central to eschatology not only in Christianity but also in Islam even though it does not appear in that messianic form in Nund Rishi's apocalypticism.

One of Nund Rishi's *shruks* expresses this concern with the poor in a sharp indictment of the rich:

*Sān shur chi nanyen wurān*  
*Yadenu' chi ratān tsākh pan*  
*Tuhind shur chi sutan muhān*  
*Gatshith tiy divān nārasan*<sup>513</sup>

Our children go without clothes  
 And tie strong threads against their stomachs to fight hunger  
 Your children grab more and more for their self  
 Even as they are about to leave the world

Some anthropologists trace this phenomenon amongst apocalyptic religious groups to what they call "relative deprivation," which they proffer as an explanation for the rise of the apocalypses. In his essay *The Biblical Roots of Apocalyptic*, Robert R. Wilson writes:

... apocalyptic religious groups are made up of people who are on the periphery of society.

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<sup>513</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam*, 73.

They lack political, religious and social power and have little social status. Furthermore, they know that they are on the periphery. They feel repressed and deprived of something which they might reasonably expect to possess...People may measure their present situation against the situation of others in the same culture or in neighbouring cultures, or they may measure their present situation against their own past situation.<sup>514</sup>

Whatever the merits of the “relative deprivation” theory, the Rishis as a religious group were indeed on the periphery in more than one sense. They were not Muslim immigrants from Persia or Central Asia but either low caste or high caste Hindu converts to Islam. They were also up against a situation which undermined local practices and culture and clearly would have measured their situation against the cultural memory of a past which had been preserved in historical chronicles such as Kalahana’s *Rājataranginī* and the Sanskrit *kāvya*s but also against the oppressive elements of that past. The “relative deprivation” theory then has explanatory power for the Kashmiri situation because of the socio-political conditions that were peculiar to Kashmir in the fourteenth century. Robert R. Wilson adds:

Although it is normal for some feelings of deprivation to exist in every society, certain conditions tend to intensify those feelings and to create larger numbers of dissatisfied and deprived individuals. Such conditions are present particularly in times of rapid social change. Wars, famines, climatic changes, national economic reversals, and the shock of sudden cross-cultural contact can all lead to unusually widespread and severe feelings of deprivation. Not only do such periods of social upheaval produce political and social inequities that lead to genuine cases of deprivation, but crises such as wars and clashes with other cultures provide opportunities for people to compare their own situation with that of outsiders. These comparisons may lead to feelings of relative deprivation and fuel social unrest. Times of social crisis frequently give rise to apocalyptic groups, for in such times feelings of deprivation are increased beyond tolerable levels.<sup>515</sup>

I am not trying to interpret the Rishi movement solely as an apocalyptic group but arguing for situating its apocalypticism in the social upheaval which gave rise to it. War, economic upheaval, rise in cross-cultural contact all of these things form the background

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<sup>514</sup> Robert R. Wilson, “The Biblical Roots of Apocalyptic,” in *Imagining the End*, edited by Abbas Amanat and Magnus Berhardsson (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2002), 59.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

to the rise of the Rishi movement in fourteenth-fifteenth century Kashmir. The rise of negative theology at multiple times in Kashmir's history can be read against the history of such crises from the fourteenth-fifteenth to nineteenth-twentieth century. We see yet again a turn to negative theology in the nineteenth century as Kashmir first came under Afghan and then Sikh occupation culminating in the British sale of Kashmir to its Dogra allies in 1846.<sup>516</sup> A detailed examination of the relations between political crises and negative theology remains beyond the scope of this dissertation and I focus here largely on the negative theology of Nund Rishi. Even as the evidence in the Biblical case for the "relative deprivation" theory is contradictory, the Rishi example reveals that the theory need not be totally discarded.<sup>517</sup> There is no way to avoid the tentative nature of any attempt to interpret the context in which the *shruks* emerged. But what the *shruks* very clearly point to is an Islamic eschatology with an almost Christian apocalyptic tone. Wilson, however, argues that it is best not to equate eschatology with apocalypticism and instead it may be more helpful to follow Paul Hanson's suggestion to use the phrase "apocalyptic eschatology" to refer to the themes and motifs associated with the end of the world in apocalyptic literature."<sup>518</sup> Wilson adds that the Bible does not deal much with 'apocalyptic eschatology' and "that there is no unified biblical view of the world's final moments."<sup>519</sup>

The same cannot be said of the Qur'ān where "apocalyptic eschatology" is the fundamental theme of the early Meccan revelations and there is more of a continuum

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<sup>516</sup> I have here in mind the rise of such Sufi poets as Shamas Faqir (1843-1901) and Wahab Khar (1842-1912).

<sup>517</sup> Robert R. Wilson, "The Biblical Roots of Apocalyptic," 60.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*

between the apocalyptic themes and eschatology. It is to these early Meccan revelations that Michael Sells turns in his compelling introduction to the Qur'ān, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations*. For Sells, it is “the meaning of life and the possibility of justice – the two interconnected themes that are at the heart of Islamic thought” which are expressed in the later Meccan Surahs.<sup>520</sup> It is these Meccan Surahs which the young Muslim students of the Qur'ān first learn when they are introduced to the text. These hymnic Surahs also have a more clearly existential thematic than the later Surahs from the Medinan period which engage Biblical history and questions of law. Sells writes:

The values presented in the very early Meccan revelations are repeated throughout the hymnic Suras. There is a sense of directness and intimacy, as if the hearer were being asked repeatedly a simple question: what will be of value at the end of a human life?<sup>521</sup>

There is yet another reason why apocalypics flourish in times of war and social upheaval. Abbas Amanat writes in his Introduction to *Imagining the End* that the apocalypse in the salvation religions of the Middle East resolves the problem of theodicy:

In the salvation religions of the Middle East the binary of the Beginning and the End paradigms is particularly powerful since it generally functions as a strategy to resolve the tension engendered by the problem of theodicy. The struggle between good and evil, which has endured since the dawn of creation, will culminate in a destructive final battle in which the victory of the forces of good over evil will be followed by divine judgment and the reward of a timeless bliss.<sup>522</sup>

The focus on salvation turned many of the apocalypics antinomian and they thus came into conflict with traditional, legalistic Islam. It is this antinomian quality of the apocalyptic experience that held out an alternative to theological dogma: “Whether crude and naïve at their inception or fully developed and articulated, these trends sought

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<sup>520</sup> Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations*, 5.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>522</sup> Abbas Amanat, “Introduction: Apocalyptic Anxieties and Millennial Hopes in the Salvation Religions of the Middle East,” in *Imagining the End*, edited by Abbas Amanat and Magnus Berhardsson (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2002), 2.

creative directions untenable to prevailing theology, if not altogether prohibited by it.”<sup>523</sup>

The historical situation of how investments in the political order of the day are carried over into theological commitments are often more complicated. There is, for instance, the evidence that if the Rishi movement came into conflict with the new Muslim State in Kashmir so did the founder of the *Kubrāwiyyā* Sufi Order, Mīr Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī, who in his brief stay in Kashmir was also not pleased with the Muslim ruler of Kashmir over the state of the *Sharī’ah*.<sup>524</sup> The immigrant Sufis entreated the Muslim Sultans of Kashmir to adhere to the *Sharī’ah* and Nund Rishi’s Sufi Order appeared to many of the Persian Sufis as a challenge to the *Sharī’ah*.<sup>525</sup> There developed serious differences between the Persian Sufis and the Kashmiri Rishis on the question of the *Sharī’ah* and restrictions had to be imposed on Nund Rishi in the reign of Sultan Sikandar.<sup>526</sup>

In all the three monotheistic traditions, the Apocalypses transform into an imminent and endless expectation of the revolution. It is this expectation of an imminent revolution which would come to be seen as a problem in the history of the Christian apocalyptic. How do we approach the imminence of the end in Nund Rishi’s vernacular apocalyptic? Do we see it as a politically passive ascetic movement or a politically revolutionary apocalyptic movement? As Arjomand puts it: “The rise of Muhammad in Arabia, whatever else it may have been, was a revolution by any reasonable definition of the term. It was sustained by a strong apocalyptic vision, and it claimed to be the realization

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>524</sup> See A Q Rafiqi, “Introduction” in *Letters of Mir Saiyid ‘Ali Hamadani*, ed. and trans. by A Q Rafiqi (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2007), 1-32.

<sup>525</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (Sydney: Goodword Media, 2003), 208.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 186.

of messianism.”<sup>527</sup> Taubes suggests that the long wait for the revolution often leads to adaptations of the apocalyptic and even interpolations:

...apocalypses arise in times of persecution, when people are on the lookout for signs of divine judgment and the devout are encouraged to wait patiently. However, if they are to retain their validity in the community, apocalypses have to be adapted to each new situation, and this inevitably leads to interpolations.<sup>528</sup>

But what is responsible for this unique political charge of the apocalyptic? Apocalypse is an act of God that first and foremost reduces every human distinction, ruse, strategy to nothing and judges humans from a standard which they cannot judge. The times of war, natural disasters, or massive social upheavals give rise to the hope of a transcendental standard which could make it possible to reorder the world. The apocalypticism of Islam must have had a wide and growing appeal in fourteenth-fifteenth century Kashmir ravaged by internecine feuds, and attacks by the Mongols. The End in the Apocalypse can only make sense from the standpoint of the impasses in the present, of the present, which strive to this or that end. As Franke writes of the Apocalypse:

Its envisioning of the end ideally is deployed in the service of clearing away the actual impasses of the present, breaking out of the patterns of conflict and oppression in which history becomes entrapped, even when only by representing them as played out *in extremis*. As the application of a vision of the end—the revelation of a definitive meaning for the whole of human life—to history and its challenges here and now, apocalypse remains rooted in the moral-prophetic, biblical milieu in which it originates.<sup>529</sup>

This feeling of impasse is captured beautifully in this *shruk* by Nund Rishi:

*Sõnas tu' sartali akue zalun*  
*Yi dīshith z̄yev myāni kalun hyot*  
*Nund̄yen lyuth tu' dīthyen ph̄olun*  
*Tave and mye tsalun hyot*<sup>530</sup>

The same use for gold and bronze

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<sup>527</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, “Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History,” 108.

<sup>528</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 70.

<sup>529</sup> William Franke, *Poetry and Apocalypse : theological disclosures of poetic language*, 15.

<sup>530</sup> Asadullah Afaqi, *Ā'īnā-e Ḥaq: Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Life Foundation, 2008), 361.

I lost my speech beholding this scene everywhere  
The good are defeated and the evil bloom  
That's why I choose to depart from this place

There is nothing that can be said with certainty about the coming of the apocalypse (it is one of the things of which knowledge is withheld by God amongst others, such as the time of one's death, in both the Islamic and the Jewish tradition).

Taubes turns to Kierkegaard to make sense of the paradox of an infinite passion or waiting and the fundamental lack of any certainty: "Faith is precisely the contradiction between infinite passion of spirituality and objective uncertainty."<sup>531</sup> Nund Rishi's apocalyptic remains suspended in the not yet of what is to come in the pasts of the present and the presents of the past. But Taubes also reads Kierkegaard with Marx (who speaks of a socio-economic apocalypse in a tone not entirely dissimilar from ancient apocalypses despite his strident critique of religion). For Kierkegaard, according to Taubes, human equality "will not be achieved in the element of disparity and brokenness [*Gebrochenheit*]." <sup>532</sup> That is why all worldly apocalypses fail on account of their worldliness.

This tension would mark all apocalypses and Nund Rishi's apocalypticism is no exception. The apocalypse must be other-worldly if it is to call for a complete change in the world as it is, but such a demand remains an irreducibly worldly demand. The paradox is the condition of possibility of the apocalypse. There are also real consequences, if in a concrete historical situation, a messianic or apocalyptic movement fails to bring about a public redemption. It then has no choice but to either retreat or turn

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<sup>531</sup> Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 117.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

inwards. This is perhaps one way of understanding the gradual disappearance of the Rishi Order in Kashmir (a question to which there can be no definitive answer but one which we had posed in the Introduction as a problem).

We see in Nund Rishi less of Gnosis (and this also sets him apart from Lal Ded) and more of a turn to an apocalyptic tone shaped by the early Islamic mysticism of such figures like Sahl al-Tūstārī and Ḥaṣan al-Baṣrī. The Sufism of Nund Rishi is clearly in tension with the Gnosis that one can call the Neoplatonic strain of Sufism. But we also see Nund Rishi affirm elements of a more Gnostic Sufism which calls for a transformation of the self through the recognition of its identity with the not-self. One can then speak of a tension between the Gnostic-mystical and religious-ascetic modes in Nund Rishi. The religious-ascetic mode in itself appears in the dual register of Islamic asceticism and the Hindu-Buddhist asceticisms that were dominant in Kashmir before the advent of Islam in the region. Thus it is not easy to arrive at a clear understanding of Nund Rishi's Sufism except by approaching the play of these contradictions in his poetic thinking. The turn towards Sufism in medieval Islam parallels developments in early Christianity, where matters of eschatology gradually came to be about the ends of the soul as the messianic horizon started receding from history. But the situation in the fourteenth and fifteenth-century Kashmir activated the hidden messianic element in Islamic eschatology as a vernacular apocalypse. This is how Taubes summarizes the developments in the early Christian tradition and offers vital clues to understanding similar shifts in the Islamic tradition after the tenth century:

From the second to the fourth century, eschatological hopes continue to fade away...Christian theology comes under the sway of speculative Gnosis. In exactly the same way as early Christianity develops in the climate of Jewish apocalypticism, Christian

theology develops in a Gnostic environment. The nearness of the *coming* Christ changes into the nearness of the *present* redeemer [*anwesender Erlöser*]. Redemption [*Erlösung*] now means the release [*Lösung*] of pneuma from the prison of matter. The path to salvation is signposted by mysteries and sacred rites. In place of the early Christian expectation of the Kingdom comes the destiny of the soul. The events of the End Time fade into parables depicting the journey of the soul. Ascension to heaven once conceived as a future event, becomes the ascent of the soul through the aeons.<sup>533</sup>

As eschatological hopes began to fade away in the Islamic tradition, we witness the rise of a Gnostic Sufi theology from the ninth century. This parallels the shifts in the early Church from apocalypticism to Gnosis in the continued delaying of the Parousia.<sup>534</sup> The revolutionary sayings of Jesus could soon be read as a call to a life of constant action and prayer.<sup>535</sup> We then have a more individual eschatology, where one's own salvation is at stake rather than a collective redemption. This element is already present in Nund Rishi and tones down the effect of his apocalypticism.

Consider this statement by Origen: "Those who have a profound understanding of the gospel...are not particularly concerned with the end of the world in general, whether it will come at once or creep up on us, but their thoughts are on one thing only: that the end of every one of us will come without his knowing, since the day and hour of his death remain hidden from him."<sup>536</sup> Nund Rishi's vernacular apocalypse remains undecidable between apocalyptic eschatology and Gnostic Sufism.<sup>537</sup> This is largely because of the turbulent political situation in late fourteenth-century and early fifteenth-century Kashmir. For Nund Rishi's Kashmir, Islam wasn't necessarily a religion in which

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<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>537</sup> Jacob Taubes relies on Hans Jonas's pioneering study of Gnosticism to argue that Gnosis not only arrested the power and appeal of Christian eschatology but also helped to transform it in the absence of an apocalyptic end: "The knowing *Gnosis* replaces the Pauline *pistis* and thereby diminishes the importance of eschatology." Ibid.

eschatological hope had already started to fade and was replaced by signposts of spiritual exercises and rituals. The newness of Islam in Kashmir allowed Nund Rishi to shift between Gnostic and apocalyptic elements. The Gnostic self-transformation emerged out of an inner reversal, or collapse, giving rise to an outer reversal, or revolution, in the field of the political. The apocalyptic is often interpreted by Nund Rishi as an inner event but at the same time it is also effectively used to rally support against the injustices of the political order of the time. If there is the messianic urgency of a death creeping up on us in Nund Rishi, there is also an unmistakable turn to an existential understanding of death.

There is a caesura in Nund Rishi's thinking of the death and the apocalypse (between the last day of human life and the End Time) but a connection persists that unsettles not only death and End Time but life itself. Time reveals itself as a fundamental mystery in Nund Rishi's apocalypticism. Nund Rishi meditates upon the instants which pass one another in a succession of revelations:

*Dami dīnthu'm nad sol vāni*  
*Dami dīnthu'm sum natu' tār*  
*Dami dīnthu'm thar pholu' vāni*  
*Dami dīnthu'm gul natu' khār*<sup>538</sup>

In an instant, I see a slow stream  
 In an instant, a raging stream  
 In an instant, I see a blossoming bunch  
 In an instant, I neither see a flower nor the desert

There is a whole series of *shruks* which deals with time as instants in a quasi-cinematic montage that produce a sudden awareness of human history as endless ruination:

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<sup>538</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 258.

*Dami dyunthum shabnam p̄yevān*  
*Dami dyunthum p̄yevān sūr*  
*Dami dyunthum gatu' pach h̄yevān*  
*Dami dyunthum pholvun nūr*<sup>539</sup>

In an instant, I see dew on earth  
In an instant, I see the ashes  
In an instant, I see a dark moonless night  
In an instant, I see bright the light of dawn

In another of the *shruks* with the same theme, the transitoriness of the world is connected to the hubris of all worldly ambition:

*Dami dīnthu'm dazū'h vān gajī*  
*Dami dyunthum dāh natu' sās*  
*Dami dīnthu'm Pāndū mājī*  
*Dami dīnthu'm krāj mās*<sup>540</sup>

In an instant, I see a burning fire in the hearth  
In an instant, I see neither smoke nor air  
In an instant, I see the mother of the Pandavas  
In an instant, I see an ordinary woman

The theme of the transitoriness of human life was a common trope in Sufi metaphysics. These *shruks* serve as a powerful example of Nund Rishi's critique of identity from the standpoint of an impermanent self confronted with changing phenomena. These *shruks* belong to a set the authorship of which is in dispute between Lal Ded and Nund Rishi.

The apocalyptic, however, is not about despair. Apocalypse is about an irreversible collapse or a cataclysmic end but it can also often renew hope in (if not fulfill the promise of ) a radically Other future. That is why generations of Kashmiri readers of Nund Rishi have turned to his *shruks* not in suicidal despair but in hope. One might as

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<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 259.

well concede that the apocalyptic is not merely concerned with the destruction of End Time but also the possibility of a new life. Yet there is still a question that one must address: why such a terrible and fearsome imagery? Why the apocalyptic tone? Let us take, for example, the following *shruk* by Nund Rishi:

*Ādijan sapanī anjaru 'h panjaro*  
*Tsyetas pāva 'e avalim rāth*  
*Pānas chānis gatshi zaru 'h zaro*  
*Kyāh karu ' kyāh karu ' tsolu 'e nu ' zāth*<sup>541</sup>

Your bones will be shattered and scattered  
You shall remember with the first night in the grave  
Your body will be broken into pieces  
You never gave up on – What shall I do? What must I do?

Or take, for instance, the following *shruk*:

*Tsu ' chukh bihith pyeth robu ' khānas*  
*Mehmānas jā 'e kati dikh*  
*Chān yali vasi tsandan tānas*  
*Tṛ kas chānas van kyā dikh*<sup>542</sup>

You are sitting in every house  
How can you clear space for the guest?  
When the carpenter would go to work on my body  
What will you offer to the carpenter of that world?

The physical ruination of a human body is for Nund Rishi a metaphor for apocalyptic end but an end which may also open up to a future. The experience of calamity is corporeal but leaves the possibility open for a new relation to the Other. Franke concedes that the apocalyptic imagery is meant to horrify yet it is also a way of gathering up all despair as hope:

This imagery, admittedly, is meant to horrify and appall, yet only as a means of pointing out what is horrifying and appalling in the realities being actually lived through in current

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>542</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al- 'Ālam*, 116.

history. The extreme imagery of apocalyptic is undoubtedly an expression of despair, but it is a despair that is connected with hope, a despair in the historical order that is continuous with a hope for its transcendence into a radically new order of existence.<sup>543</sup>

Nund Rishi clearly wants to shift our attention from the *chān* (carpenter) of this world to the *chān* (carpenter) of the invisible world. The apocalyptic does not reduce the future to a formula, but rather the future has an open character in the apocalyptic, which is forever, and irreducibly, other.<sup>544</sup> We do not have in Nund Rishi's vernacular apocalypse either a call for revenge or withdrawal. but a movement towards passivity. Nund Rishi's images of horror seek to preserve the future beyond our understanding as radically Other to which one can only surrender. It is impossible to represent the apocalypse but it is this impossibility which unveils the apocalyptic. The Apocalyptic does not then merely provide us with a correct representation of the future but reveals the inadequacy of all representation.<sup>545</sup> Every revelation in the apocalyptic essentially remains veiled in the element of metaphor. Even the future of the apocalyptic can be approached only through negations:

*Na rozih vandu 'h tu' na rjetu' kolu'e*  
*Na boli shravanu' patu' kostūr*  
*Na rozih sōkhu' sāv na huyi holo'e*  
*Na rozih dōha'e sāzu'h sontūr*<sup>546</sup>

Neither there will be a winter nor a summer  
Neither the thrush's beautiful song in the monsoon  
Neither will there be peace or tranquility nor chaos  
Neither will there be any music one day

What is it essentially that the Apocalypse seeks to reveal? The Apocalypse is a revelation that seeks to disclose "that there is no revelation beyond the ultimacy of

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<sup>543</sup> William Franke, *Poetry and Apocalypse : theological disclosures of poetic language*, 15.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>546</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'*, 256.

death—a realization that renders life its full presence as real and totally actual.”<sup>547</sup> Moral apocalyptists such as Nund Rishi turn to the apocalyptic for the revelation of the ultimacy of death. It is clear that it isn’t ruination but cataclysmic destruction that is a sign of the apocalyptic. But the apocalyptic gives a structure to the history of ruination. The unveiling at stake in the revelations of the apocalyptic is a destruction. The Greek word, *Apokaluptō*, does carry with it a strong element of destruction which is sometimes obscured in its translation as “unveiling” or “revelation.” But the Greek *apokalupsis* conveys less a meaning of a catastrophe and more the meaning of an uncovering or unveiling. In one of Jacques Derrida’s most significant writings on the Apocalyptic, *Of an Apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy*, the first thing we learn is that the Greek word *apokalupsis* is a translation of the Hebrew *gala* (to reveal). Derrida writes:

*Apokaluptō* no doubt was a good word, a witticism [*bon mot*] for *gala*. *Apokaluptō*, I disclose, I uncover, I unveil, I reveal the thing that can be a part of the body, the head or the eyes, a secret part, the genitals or whatever might be hidden, a secret, the thing to be dissembled, a thing that does not show itself or say itself, that perhaps signifies itself but cannot or must not first be handed over to its self-evidence.<sup>548</sup>

The Apocalypse may also mean “uncovering” or “unveiling,” yet the apocalyptic texts have always been connected to destruction.<sup>549</sup> In an essay about the translation from Hebrew to Greek of ‘apocalypse,’ Jonathan Boyarin writes:

Yet if the element of destruction is there from the origin of apocalyptic, as it were, it is also important to mark the slide from this original sense of uncovering, revealing a secret knowledge to the common modern notion of the apocalypse as a cataclysm leading to an “endtime.”<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>548</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Of an apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy,” *Semeia* 23 (1982), 64.

<sup>549</sup> Jonathan Boyarin, “At Last, All the *Goyim*: Notes on a Greek Word Applied to Jews,” in *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*, edited by Richard Dellamora. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 42.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 42.

There is another sense in which the Apocalyptic is not merely about “uncovering”: it is, as we already hinted, enmeshed with the Gnostic secret of the universe. As Boyarin points out: The Apocalyptic texts deal both with the “Gnostic doctrine of the secret nature of the universe, but also always ‘the inevitability of a [future] final judgment.’”<sup>551</sup> This tension appears in the history of Sufism as a dialectic between Gnostic spiritual exercises and Qur’ānic eschatology. It now appears that the apocalyptic itself emerged at these crossroads of Gnosticism and eschatology. Boyarin writes: “Since the ‘historical’ ancient apocalypses, as suggested above, fundamentally include an aspect of judgment leading to reward and punishment, the notion of apocalypse without apocalypse could also mean endtime-without-judgment.”<sup>552</sup> But is it possible to have an apocalypse without the cataclysm of the messianic event? The historical messianisms are, Derrida reminds us, “the only events on the basis of which we approach and first of all name the messianic in general, that other ghost which we cannot and ought not do without.”<sup>553</sup> John D. Caputo adds in his *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*: “We would not know what messianicity is without messianism, without these events which were Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ, and so on. In that case singular events would have unveiled or revealed these universal possibilities and it is only on that condition that we can describe messianicity.”<sup>554</sup> Against this, Boyarin suggests, the Derridean apocalypse without

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<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>553</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 211-12. Quoted by John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 136.

<sup>554</sup> Jacques Derrida’s remarks on a public roundtable, which inaugurated the doctoral program in philosophy at Villanova University, quoted in John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 136-37. See also “The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida” in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with*

apocalypse is “not merely a rhetorical or philosophical figure of presence-in-absence but is rather transcribable as endtime-without-revelation: the ultimate evacuation of any hope of meaning.”<sup>555</sup> Derrida’s apocalypse without apocalypse is the hope without hope. We do know, however, that Apocalyptic thinking – both Christian and Muslim – persists in forms that envision a destruction and/or severe punishment for non-believers. Such an insistence on the punishment of non-believers is strangely absent in Nund Rishi, who remains focused on the time that remains in human life. Yet there are elements of the historical and moral Muslim apocalypse in Nund Rishi’s *shruks*. The question then seems to be if Nund Rishi is using the elements of a Muslim apocalypse to move towards an apocalypse without apocalypse in a rather Derridean sense. We can phrase this question slightly differently: if the End Times have always been with us, what is at stake in the apocalyptic? How is Nund Rishi’s apocalyptic any different from traditional Islamic eschatology? The Apocalyptic is not merely philosophical (in thinking the end of man from the truth of man), it is also theologico-political.<sup>556</sup> It is nothing less than a political future that is at stake in the vernacular apocalypse of Nund Rishi. The apocalypses are almost always leading us to an insurrection against the world, and it is because of this that traditional theologians – Jewish, Christian or Muslim – are opposed to them. But such an insurrection does not merely have worldly concerns for its end and therein lies the paradox of the apocalyptic.

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*Jacques Derrida*, edited with a commentary by John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 3-28.

<sup>555</sup> Jonathan Boyarin, “At Last, All the *Goyim*: Notes on a Greek Word Applied to Jews”, 43.

<sup>556</sup> John D. Caputo cautions us in his *The Prayer and Tears of Jacques Derrida*: “Those who declare the end of this or that have their own ends in view, and we must stay alert as to where they are trying to lead us, pedagogically, demagogically, mystagogically, synagogically, or whatever.” See John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 90.

Let us return to Jacques Derrida's essay on the apocalyptic. Derrida approaches the Apocalyptic from the *tone* of the apocalyptic which is much more widespread than any strict, religious discourse of the Apocalyptic (the tone of the clamor over climate change, for instance!). Can we isolate differences or an identity in the multiple tones of an apocalyptic? But what is a tone? Derrida writes:

Tone has been little studied for itself, if we suppose that such is possible or has ever been done. A tone's distinctive signs are difficult to isolate, if they even exist in complete purity, which I doubt, above all in a written discourse. With what is a tone, a change or rupture of tone marked? And how do we recognize a tonal difference within the same corpus?<sup>557</sup>

We might phrase this question differently here for our purposes: is there a tonal difference or shift between the eschatology of Lal Ded and the apocalypses of Nund Rishi. Derrida raises the following set of questions about the apocalypists and their tone (let us keep all apocalypists including Nund Rishi in mind as we read this set of questions):

What benefit? What seductive or intimidating bonus? What social or political advantage? Do they want to cause fear? Do they want to cause pleasure? To whom and how? Do they want to terrify? To make one sing? To blackmail? [*Faire chanter*] To lure into a going-one-better in enjoyment? Is this contradictory? With a view to what interests, *to what ends* do they wish to come with these inflamed proclamations on the end to come or the end already accomplished?...The eschatological tells the *eskhaton*, the end, or rather the extreme, the limit, the term, the last, what comes *in extremis* to close a history, a genealogy, or very simply a countable series.<sup>558</sup>

Derrida offers us here the basic economy of the apocalyptic in the announcements of those who proclaimed the end of philosophy in the eighteenth century but this is a structure easily transposable to any other apocalyptic genre. Derrida writes:

Whoever takes on the apocalyptic tone comes to signify to, if not tell, you something. What? The truth, of course, and to signify to you that it reveals the truth to you; the tone is the revelator of some unveiling in process. Unveiling or truth, apophantics of the imminence of the end, of whatever returns at the limit, at the end of the world. Not only truth as the revealed truth of a secret on the end or of the secret of the end. Truth itself is the end and the

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<sup>557</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Of an apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy," 66.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

instance of the Last Judgment. The structure of truth here would be apocalyptic. And that is why there would not be any truth of the apocalypse that is not the truth of truth.<sup>559</sup>

Nothing less than the truth of truth is at stake in the apocalyptic. But what is even more distinctive about the Apocalyptic (revealed in an exemplary way in the Johanne Apocalyptic) is that it never is clear who addresses and who is the addressee in the apocalyptic. There is a relay of voices (this is the case with prophecies of the end and the historical apocalypics) and so the text is apocalyptic in as much as we no longer know who speaks. Derrida writes:

No longer do we know very well who loans his voice and tone to the other in the Apocalypse; no longer do we know very well who addresses what to whom. But by a catastrophic overturning here more necessary than ever, we can as well think this: as soon as we no longer know who speaks or who writes, the text becomes Apocalyptic.<sup>560</sup>

We are moving towards an understanding of the apocalyptic beyond the fundamentalisms of religious dogma or the Enlightenment: the Apocalyptic as our situation. Literature is a good metaphor for this situation. Caputo unpacks this reading of the Apocalyptic in Derrida as a reversal of a commonsensical understanding of the apocalyptic:

So, by what Derrida's calls [*sic*] a "catastrophic reversal," we can venture a much more Babelian hypothesis: "as soon as one no longer knows who speaks or who writes, the text becomes apocalyptic". That would make for an unbelievable apocalyptic structure (or maybe the only one we can believe, however much apoplexy this may cause believers): a text is apocalyptic just when the confusion and profusion run wild.<sup>561</sup>

The Apocalypse in Derrida is about that which remains wholly Other and yet is "to Come." We are not concerned here with the sociology of the apocalyptic (the apocalyptic genre is conservative and yet it tends to escape the vigilance of censorship in some of its more radical pronouncements).<sup>562</sup> Nor in the elements that the apocalyptic gathers up to

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>561</sup> John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 92.

<sup>562</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Of an apocalyptic tone recently adopted in philosophy," 89.

itself: numbers, visions, and theophanic utterances.<sup>563</sup> Apocalypse is no longer the revelation of a secret but the avowal that there is no secret, “no *Geheimnis* that anybody knows or can get straight, no high ground above the *goyim*, but only ‘the divisible *envois* for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination’”<sup>564</sup> Blindness and not vision is all that we have to go on.<sup>565</sup>

The Qur’ān has multiple terms for the apocalypse such as *yawm ad-dīn* or *qiyama* and the Qur’ānic words for the Apocalyptic give us meanings which range from ‘the Day,’ ‘the Hour,’ ‘the Reckoning’ to ‘the Standing’. *Yawm ad-dīn* is one of the key Qur’ānic terms for the Islamic eskhaton and can be literally translated as the Day of Reckoning. The earth gives birth on the day of reckoning. Michael Sells writes: “The word translated here as reckoning (*dīn*) is related to a number of terms for borrowing and payment of debt, as well as to terms for religion and faith. The word for day (*yawm*) can also be a more general term for any length of time or a moment in time.”<sup>566</sup> The *yawm ad-dīn* (‘the day of judgment,’ or ‘the moment of truth’) is “an ontological reversal” that can take place in an instant (even if it may take some time after time to recognize it).<sup>567</sup> Michael Sells writes that on this day that which seemed “secure and lasting—the skies, the seas, the stars, the reality of death as contained in graves—is torn away.”<sup>568</sup> But at the same time, Sells adds: “What seemed inconsequential—a ‘mote’s weight’ of good or a ‘mote’s weight’ of wrong (Sura 99:7-8)—is revealed as enduring and real.”<sup>569</sup> Sells

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<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>564</sup> John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, 93.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

<sup>566</sup> Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’ān: The Early Revelations*, 35.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

argues that the day-of-reckoning passages in the Qur’ān are translated without paying attention to key syntactical ambiguities. “When those ambiguities are respected, the day of reckoning passages become centered on a kind of questioning—a questioning that combines a sense of awe with a sense of intimacy.”<sup>570</sup> Sells’ example for such a questioning is the Qur’ānic Surah *Al-Qār’ia*. This returns us to the *shruk* with which we began this chapter. The reference to mountains being blown off like carded wool in the *shruk* is from Surah *Al-Qār’ia*. In the Surah *al-Qāria*, the Apocalypse is a day when “human beings are like moths scattered/And mountains are like fluffs of wool.”<sup>571</sup> *Surah Al-Ma’arij* (70:6-9) too uses the same metaphor for the cataclysm on the Day of Judgment:

“They see it from afar  
 We see it near  
 A day the sky will be like molten copper  
 And the mountains like fluffs of wool”<sup>572</sup>

And in the *Surah Adh-Dhariyat*, the image is of a day when “the sky will sway/and the mountains slide away”<sup>573</sup> As Sells points out, this again recalls the image from *Surah al-Qaria*.<sup>574</sup> We can now briefly turn to Michael Sells’ commentary on *Surah Al-Qār’ia*:

The Sura includes two mysterious words, *qār’ia* (a word that could mean smashing, obliterating, crushing, or calamity), and *hāwīya* (a word that means variously a mother who has lost her first-born child, desire, abyss, and falling). The Sura begins with three staccato references to the *qār’ia*. It then asks what can tell what the *qār’ia* is. However it does not define the *qār’ia*. Instead it speaks of the day in which the *qār’ia* occurs as a day in which mountains are like fluffed tufts of wool and human beings like scattered moths—an image evocative of the inversion of strong and weak that is characteristic of the early revelations.<sup>575</sup>

These Qur’ānic narratives leave a clear imprint on Nund Rishi’s mystical verse. The

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<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 112. The translation of the verses from this Surah are by Michael Sells.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 119. The translation of the verses from this Surah are by Michael Sells.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 198. The translation of the verses from this Surah are by Michael Sells.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

apocalyptic force of *Al-Qār'ia* is echoed in the *shruks* of Nund Rishi. Take, for instance, the Surah *al-'Adiyat* where “a conflation of pre-Islamic paradigms of epic poetry and the apocalyptic imagery that circulated in the Near East” presents itself.<sup>576</sup> The staccato rhythm of this Surah (By the Coursers snorting/By the fire-strikers sparking/By the chargers at morning/Dust around them exploding/Within it the center holding) is echoed in many of Nund Rishi’s apocalyptic *shruks* especially the one with which we began this Chapter.<sup>577</sup> In another of Nund Rishi’ *shruks*, Nund Rishi again turns to the horrific image of end times:

*Tavu' tāvu' sūr gatshi kōhan tu' bālan*  
*Na formānan trāvan yot*  
*Janatas jantī āsan chāvan*  
*Tatī mā dapham zās kath kyut*<sup>578</sup>

The searing heat will melt hills and mountains to ash  
The disobedient shall be abandoned here  
The good shall enjoy their days in Paradise  
You will not ask there, why was I born?

The Qur’ān is largely apocalyptic, but some parts of it deal much more with this theme than the others, and the three chapters which deal explicitly with the Apocalypse are Surahs 81, 82 and 99. These three chapters, as one can glean from their names *At-Takwīr* (The Cleaving, or The Overturning), *Al-'Infiṭār* (The Overthrowing, or The Tearing) and *Az-zalzalah* (The Quaking), explicitly portray the way natural order is upset at end times.<sup>579</sup> Some passages such as 81: 1-14 are the earliest to be revealed on the theme of

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 110. The translation of the verses from this Surah are by Michael Sells.

<sup>578</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 148.

<sup>579</sup> Frederik Leemhuis, “Apocalypse,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Quran*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 112.

the Apocalyptic. The theme that mountains move like teased wool in the *shruk* with which we started the chapter is clearly Qur'ānic, and so is the image of the domes (of heaven) rent asunder. It is clear that an objective description of the last day is not the purpose of the Qur'ān but instead the Qur'ān seeks to instill the fear of a final and cataclysmic event that would involve each individual's reckoning. Does this event appear in Nund Rishi's poetry as a figure of death or of a future to come? When the Qur'ān speaks of the heaven and earth "made true" on the Day of Judgment (84:1-5), the mysterious expression "made true" (*ḥuqqat*) could mean that "the heaven and earth are rectified during the day of reckoning and made attentive to the deeper reality intimated by the revelation—as if the heaven and earth carried the burden of the human condition."<sup>580</sup>

The Qur'ān speaks of "the calamity" (*al-qāri'a*) in relation to that which overtakes transgressing nations (a detail which makes the appearance of its elements in the Nund Rishi *shruk* as doubly significant as he deploys the apocalyptic against the new political order of *Shahmīrī* Sultans). The root for tremble (r-j-f) "is used in both apocalyptic passages and in punishment stories (...Q7:78, 91, 155; 29:37; 73:14, 79:6)."<sup>581</sup> There appears to be a connection between the violence of natural or political cataclysms and the End: it is as if the political violence of the world prefigures the Apocalypse. The natural destruction (*sangar tār zan wazan*: the mountains will blow off like carder's wool) too is often used as a metaphor for the destruction to come, but chronologically it is a prelude to the Apocalypse. Only God knows the time of the Apocalypse, and even Prophet Muhammad is said to have no knowledge of the time of its occurrence. But it is also

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<sup>580</sup> Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations*, 61.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*

clearly stated that the end is near at hand.<sup>582</sup> This nearness is always interpreted existentially rather than literally in the Islamic tradition.

The end is always near in the Muslim apocalyptic. But Nund Rishi brings the apocalypse near in both the existential and the political senses. Cook writes: “For the most part the Muslim apocalypticist is quite cautious as far as saying exactly when the End will occur... One widely quoted tradition says that the Prophet does not know when the Hour will come: literally, that he does not know any more than the one asking the question.”<sup>583</sup> Many Qur’ānic verses state unambiguously that only God knows when the End will come.<sup>584</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that there appears to be more of an emphasis on the Signs or portents of the End in the Muslim apocalyptic. Cook writes:

It is rather interesting to speculate that this Qur’ānic prohibition may have led to the development of apocalyptic traditions in another way, since merely *watching* the signs and portents of the End was not prohibited, and even encouraged, and so this could have assisted the legitimization of this activity at its beginning.<sup>585</sup>

We come across this activity in Nund Rishi’s apocalypitics in many of his *shruks*. Here I would like to single out just one theme among the signs and portents that appear in the *shruks*: the theme of moral decay and strong condemnation of sin. What precisely is at stake in the apocalyptic condemnation of sin? Cook writes:

Most of these themes are common to all faiths, so there is no point in delving into activities such as murder, fornication and treachery, which are universally condemned... the apocalypticist is not being unrealistic in his condemnation of society. He understands that there will always be sin and evil people. What incenses him is the fact that in the Muslim society in which he is living these actions are not being publicly condemned.<sup>586</sup>

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2002), 18-19.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 232.

The attack is not on sins as such but the religious and political situation that tolerates these conditions. This leads the apocalypticist to attack the moral indifference to sin by the rulers and theologians. The stakes for the apocalypticist are clearly as this-worldly as they are other-worldly. Some of the most popular *shruks* in Kashmiri cultural memory are those that deal with apocalyptic vision revealed as the signs and portents of End Times. Most such signs deal with supposedly unnatural occurrences or reversals of natural order before a complete destruction of the natural world.<sup>587</sup> One of the most popular refrains from the Nund Rishi oeuvre, which has passed into ordinary Kashmiri as a popular idiom, is *Su hā māli āsi vāndar rāj* (It will be the time of the rule of the beasts).<sup>588</sup> In a *shruk* addressed to his disciple Baba Nāsir al-Dīn, Nund Rishi speaks of a topsy-turvy world and its inevitability:

*Nasr Bābu' boz goru' s̄and vatsan*  
*Soru' s̄anz v̄odi āsi moru' sund tāj*  
*V̄yethu' h̄okhan tu' han̄yer gr̄yēzan*  
*Su hā māli āsi vāndar rāj*<sup>589</sup>

Nasr, listen to your teacher's words  
The peacock's crown shall be on the head of a pig  
The rivers shall dry up but gutters will overflow  
It will be the time of the rule of the beasts

The Qur'ān calls the signs of the End as the signs of the Hour, or *ishārāt al-sā'a*.

The cataclysmic events which bring about the end of the world, called the greater signs or

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<sup>587</sup> As Smith and Haddad put it: "Preceding the final judgment will come signs (both cosmic and moral) signaling the arrival of the Hour as well as the specific events of the resurrection and assessment. Within this overall structure is the individual cycle which specifies the events of creation, death, and resurrection." Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 5.

<sup>588</sup> The line can also be translated as: "It would then be a topsy-turvy world."

<sup>589</sup> Asadullah Afaqi, *Ā'inā-e Ḥaq: Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Life Foundation, 2008), 362. This *shruk* is a part of a longer narrative poem with the refrain, *Su hā māli āsi vāndar rāj* (It will be the time of the rule of the beasts).

*'alāmāt al-sā'a*, are events “that will literally devastate the earth and reverse the natural processes, which throughout the Qur’ān are consistently cited as proof of God’s ordinance and authority.”<sup>590</sup> Smith and Haddad offer a vivid summary of these disasters in the natural order:

In the disruption of the natural order as portrayed in the Qur’ān one can see a reverse process of the creation. The heavens, understood as seven layers, are stripped away, rolled up, and destroyed. The stars, lamps set in the lowest part of the heavens, fall and are extinguished, while the sun and moon are covered. The earth itself shakes and rocks and is finally split apart and ground to dust, its mountains first put in motion and then leveled. Even the seas, divided from each other at the creation, mix together again in a primordial chaos.<sup>591</sup>

The natural chaos is preceded by the moral chaos of which many Islamic theologians speak of in a conservative tone. A moral decay leads up to the dénouement in the natural disaster as a prelude to punishment and reward in the hereafter. The bare economy of the Qur’ānic Apocalypse gave rise to a wildly proliferating genre, in which accretions and emendations could be made to develop a corpus more moralistic and conservative than Qur’ānic eschatology. It is therefore not surprising that this strain of the moral apocalypse is the dominant one in the Nund Rishi corpus. I do not intend here to suggest that the conservative tone of the *shruks* in this vein in Nund Rishi is either because of later interpolations, or to express Nund Rishi’s true beliefs, but rather to assert that such conservatism is the signature of the moral apocalyptic. In the Islamic tradition, the moral disintegration is conjoined with the political situation of the Muslim community. The Islamic eschaton ushers itself in with major *fitān*, or trials.<sup>592</sup> The political always lurks in the background of the apocalyptic. The sudden presence of

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<sup>590</sup> Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 65-66.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. The term *fitān* also alludes to civil wars that shall anticipate the End Times.

apocalyptic material in fifteenth-century Kashmir signals the political tumult that preceded and followed Kashmir's transition to Islam in the fourteenth century. The preponderance of the theme of the apocalyptic in Nund Rishi's mystical poetry is even more surprising when other eschatological themes such as the Prophet's mystical ascension to heaven, *mi'rāj*, do not appear so significantly in the Nund Rishi corpus.

There is a circular movement between the end and the present in Islamic apocalypics that is mediated by the question of the political. Smith and Haddad point out that in Islamic eschatology provides "the impetus for moral rectitude in the immediate present."<sup>593</sup> There is another reason why Islamic eschatology tends to an apocalyptic politics. The afterworld of the Islamic *eschaton* unmistakably resembles this world. Nerina Rustomji writes that "Islamic eschatology provides an *afterworld*, while Christian eschatology focuses on an *afterlife*."<sup>594</sup> Rustomji contends that unlike an abstract afterlife, "the afterworld provides a setting," a world.<sup>595</sup> Rustomji writes:

The afterworld is not just the eschatological space where one happens to live after life; instead, it is a place that operates according to a distinct logic...afterworlds are typically unambiguous about one idea: life after death is not a nebulous state accessed only by the soul or the mind. Instead, an afterworld offers the structure of a world, the rhythm of daily life, and the complexity of interaction experienced in the earthly world.<sup>596</sup>

The life of a Muslim is in relation to this *afterlife* in the *afterworld*. This move away from the nebulous state of the *afterlife* to the structure of an *afterworld* is what makes Islamic eschatological thought distinctive in the three Abrahamic faiths. The difference between the *afterlife* and the *afterworld* nonetheless helps us develop our

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>594</sup> Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), xvi.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

understanding of the Muslim Apocalyptic: "...the afterlife is a part of the future, but the afterworld is a place that can be brought near during apocalyptic time..."<sup>597</sup> The attempt to bring the *afterworld* near opens up the world to the possibility of an apocalyptic reversal. The *afterworld* begins to haunt the iniquities and injustices of the world.

Rustomji writes: "The Islamic afterworld is the ultimate expression of the eschatological possibility that the Qur'an and hadiths proposed: one's future life will be led in a distinct future world."<sup>598</sup> It is the material character of the Islamic afterworld which "allowed human longings for and fears of a future life to actualize into visions of a future world."

<sup>599</sup> Nund Rishi also speaks of the materiality of the afterworld in some of his *shruks*:

*Koṅ chu'e gāsu' zamīn sobā*  
*Sōrga'e gatshī tu' kre kar*  
*Sōrgas bar pyeṭh darkh-e Tūbā*  
*Su habā sōrguk gwāshur*<sup>600</sup>

The saffron is the grass of Paradise  
 If you dream of Paradise, you must work for it  
 The Tree of Tuba is at the gates of Paradise  
 The Tree which lights up Paradise

But the material objects of Paradise here such as saffron belong to the Kashmiri landscape. Yet again in a related *shruk*, Nund Rishi speaks of the roots of this tree of Paradise as being nourished by a milky spring of *amrita* (a drink which confers immortality). The material afterworld here is not merely translated from Kashmir's Hindu-Buddhist continuum but the idea of Paradise itself is refigured as an inner space:

*Mūlan tal chus bod nāgu'rādā*

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<sup>597</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>600</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 150.

*Dodu'h rang tu' amryetu' tar*  
*Karshanu' boyakh asan vādā*  
*Darshanu' kasyekh vōndu'c thar*<sup>601</sup>

Under its roots is a huge spring  
Milky in colour and ambrosiac  
It turns their thirst into bliss  
The vision shall heal their bitter chill of winter

The *shruk* extends hope not merely of immortality but the possibility of self-transformation in this world. The “bitter chill of winter” is a metaphor which could as easily allude to the political conditions of Kashmiris (as it was later used in the early twentieth century by the Urdu poet, Iqbal).

William C. Chittick, a pre-eminent scholar of Sufism, reminds us: “The Prophet called death ‘the only preacher you need,’ and its remembrance colors all of Islamic spirituality.”<sup>602</sup> Chittick further draws our attention to the fact that the Sufi Al-Ghazālī quotes about a hundred names for the Islamic eschaton which includes the Day of Regret, the Day of Reckoning and the Day of the Gathering. Most of these names for the End are Qur’ānic.<sup>603</sup> Many of the other elements which are inseparable from an engagement with the End in the Islamic tradition, according to Chittick, are the events of the grave, the gathering or upraising of human souls on the Day of Judgment (with or without a relation to their past or future bodies), the Weighing (in relation to Justice), The Book (a record of one’s actions which leaves nothing beyond accounting), the Questioning (in relation to one’s actions and the trust received from God), the Pond (of Prophet Muhammad), the

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<sup>601</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu’* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 151.

<sup>602</sup> William C. Chittick, “Eschatology” in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Routledge, 1987), 379.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

Path (the precarious bridge that stretches over hell), the Garden (the gift of Paradise for the faithful), the Fire (the punishment for the unbelievers), and the Hour (the destruction of the world that precedes the Resurrection or the Uprising).<sup>604</sup> But in Nund Rishi, we do not encounter any serious engagement with these elements of Muslim Apocalyptic texts (historical apocalypses, messianic apocalypses) and as such there is little that we encounter in his poetry about the Dajjal (Anti-Christ), Jesus's Second Coming, the Mahdi (the Muslim Messiah), the anti-Mahdi (Sufyani), the *dabba* (the Beast that speaks to humans and is a sign of End Times), the Gog and the Magog, or other such traditional themes of the Muslim Apocalyptic literature. But what we have is an apocalyptic tone that merges ceaselessly with Nund Rishi's powerful discourse on death and at times even draws on some of the traditional themes from the Muslim apocalyptic. For instance, Nund Rishi takes up the theme of the difficult crossing of the *as sirāt*, or *pul-e sirāt* (the precarious, hair-narrow, bridge that stretches over Hell which one must pass on the day of resurrection) in relation to one's own actions in this world rather than a corporeal afterworld: *Bayi chum tami sumi and kihe vatu'/Yami tal pakān nāru'o kōl* (I fear how I will cross the bridge to the other side/under which rages a river of fire). Nund Rishi seizes upon both the signs of the coming Hour of destruction and the events leading up to that end. His apocalyptic tone is singular in the history of Kashmiri literature and signals the wider circulation and transmission of not only core Islamic texts like the Qur'ān and the Hadīth but also of secondary Islamic literature as early as the fourteenth-fifteenth century in Kashmir. Yet Nund Rishi offers a symbolic interpretation of the apocalyptic

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 380-82.

themes to call for an inner reversal, or overturning, which could also then lead to a political reversal or overturning.

Most Qur’ānic commentators display utmost restraint in dealing with the apocalyptic material even if in their other books they may elaborate upon these events. Yet Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sīna and Mulla Sadrā speculated about the symbolic meanings of Qur’ānic eschatology. Mulla Sadrā understood death as an effect of the perfection of the soul which must cut off its connection to the body in order to acquire another body.<sup>605</sup> This is also the Socratic understanding of death but with an *afterworld*. Both the philosophers and the Sufis leaned towards a symbolic interpretation of Islamic eschatology. William Chittick quotes the Persian Sufi poet Rumi:

How many children of your thoughts will you see in the grave,  
all surrounding your soul crying, “Papa!”?  
Your good thoughts give birth to youth and houris;  
your ugly thoughts give birth to great demons.<sup>606</sup>

Here the theme of the “punishments of the grave” in apocalyptic material is interpreted as nothing more than an effect of thought, and therefore, not corporeal. Such moves were more radical in Sufis like ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (d.1131) for whom the visions of the next world were based on *tamaththul*, the display of images (*mithāl*).<sup>607</sup> For instance, Hamadānī explicitly interprets the difficult questioning in the grave by the angels Munkar and Nakīr in a counterintuitive manner:

It takes place within yourself. Those of our contemporaries who are veiled from the truth have come up with this problem: How can two angels, in one instance, visit a thousand different individuals? [They conclude that] one must accept this as an article of faith [since it contradicts reason]. But in this connection Ibn Sīnā—God have mercy on him—provided a world of explanation in two sentences: “Munkar is his evil deeds, and Nakīr his good deeds.”... The ego is the mirror of blameworthy qualities, and the intellect and the heart are

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

the mirror of praiseworthy qualities. When a man looks, he sees his own attributes revealing themselves in images (*tamaththul-gāri kunad*). His own existence is his torment, though he thinks someone else is tormenting him...If you want to hear the Prophet himself say this, listen when he speaks of the chastisements of the grave: They are only your works given back to you.<sup>608</sup>

Chittick quotes another Prophetic saying: “People are asleep, but when they die, they wake up.”<sup>609</sup> Is death then a lesser resurrection? As Chittick puts it: “The experience of death for the microcosm corresponds to the coming of the Hour for the macrocosm. Hence the Quranic accounts for the end of the world can also be understood as referring to the death of the individual.”<sup>610</sup> Chittick then gives the examples of ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshāni and Al-Ghazālī who interpret the resurrection in similar terms. Chittick writes:

Al-Ghazzālī had already brought this type of commentary under the protective wing of mainstream Islam in his *Ihyā’*: “I mean by ‘Lesser Resurrection’ the state of death, for the Prophet—God bless him and give him peace—said, ‘He who has died has undergone his resurrection.’” He explains that all the terms that refer to the Greater Resurrection have their equal (*naẓīr*) in the Lesser Resurrection. Thus the earth corresponds to the body, mountains to bones, the sky to the head, the sun to the heart, the stars to the senses, grass to hair, trees to limbs, etc.<sup>611</sup>

*Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (The revival of religious sciences) is a very popular text in South Asian Sufi traditions. What is indeed surprising about this text is the degree to which it interprets the Qur’ānic verses as metaphors for death without negating the Greater Resurrection. The Sufis repeatedly complicate the separation between this world and the end world. But what is at stake more for some Sufis than the others is the way such a relation can reconfigure the politics of the present.

There is also a deep connection between the apocalyptic texts of Islam and the classical apocalyptic literature. David Cook writes in his *Studies in the Muslim*

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<sup>608</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

*Apocalyptic* that Islam inherited a vast apocalyptic literature from the classical world.<sup>612</sup>

David Cook reminds us that historical apocalypses in the early centuries of Islam and Islamic conquest bore a close resemblance to Christian and Jewish apocalyptic texts:

Much of the material is ascribed to Ka‘b al Aḥbār and his associates (converted Jews), while a number of the transmitters bear names indicating a Christian background. In the apocalyptic texts there are indications of day-to-day contact between different groups. In addition to this, Luitprand of Cremona (visiting Constantinople in 968) bears witness to the common apocalyptic heritage of both Muslims and Christians when he states that the books of Daniel were in the hands of both Byzantines and Muslims, who used them to ascertain the future and plan out battles.<sup>613</sup>

Let us take, for example, the dome of the first *shruk* we discussed in this Chapter:

*Gunbad wazan dun dun kith* (The domes resound with the blows). The use of the dome as a symbol is significant here because it emerges in the Muslim Apocalyptic in relation to the Dome of the Rock and the Temple at Jerusalem. One of the characteristics of the Muslim moral apocalypses is “the attack on the building of beautiful buildings.”<sup>614</sup> Cook writes why the apocalypticist targets buildings and their beautiful domes:

That the builders of these buildings can only be hostile to the apocalypticist is implicit in their willingness to build “permanent” structures: the End is distant, so there is a future for the structures. If this was not so, then they would hardly be willing to put such a huge amount of effort and money into them. All of this is totally opposed to the world view of the apocalypticist. He believes that the End is immediate, imminent, and cares nothing for the outer beauty of the structures. They will be destroyed in the apocalyptic wars just around the corner, or at the very latest, when the world ends. He is far more interested in the inner conditions of peoples’ hearts. Indeed, this theme is one of his most powerful weapons: to contrast the outer beauty or perfection of something (in this case the mosque) with its inner rot—the unbelief of the people using it.<sup>615</sup>

The relentless attack on the *mullah* in Nund Rishi should be seen in this context: the unbelief of the people used to a luxurious and comfortable lifestyle. I have already cited a

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<sup>612</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

*shruk* in the previous Chapter where Nund Rishi is critical of the *mullāhs*. Let us take a look at another such *shruk*:

*Vophe batu 'anvo ranvo lokhre*  
*Vophe batu ' bakhre khye khye sāng*  
*Vophe batu ' kheyāv malu ' sanzu 'h kokre*  
*Tām ti māli par 'e shongithu 'i bāng*<sup>616</sup>

Do collect free rice and cook  
Even the dogs lost their way eating free rice  
When the *mullāh*'s chicken had free rice  
It too gave the call to prayer lying down

Nund Rishi castigates the *mullāhs* here as parasites on society who are no longer interested in any works of faith. The theme that is reworked here by Nund Rishi as a simultaneous critique of easy living and ascetic retreats (as ascetics living on the margins of society were also likely to beg for alms) is Qur'ānic in origin. The following verses from Surah *At-Takāthur* (Meccan period) exemplify this Qur'ānic attitude: “The avarice of plenitude keeps you occupied/Till you reach the grave.”<sup>617</sup> Even the call to prayer (the most basic responsibility of the *mullāhs*) is a burden to them. In another *shruk*, Nund Rishi humorously speaks of the *mullāh*'s fear of the mosque. In most Muslim Apocalypstics, the *'ulamā* are the target of the apocalypstist's ire much more than even the rulers. Why? Cook writes: “While they had serious disagreements with the government, the religious leadership was much closer to the apocalypstists' hearts, especially in light of the fact that this was precisely the group that was supposed to be making the society a Muslim one. In the opinion of the apocalypstist, the religious establishment had nothing to

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<sup>616</sup> Asadullah Afaqi, *Ā'inā-e Ḥaq: Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam* (Srinagar: Life Foundation, 2008), 321. This *shruk* is given in a slight variation in Amin Kamil's *Nūrnāmu'*. Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 182.

<sup>617</sup> *Al-Qur'ān: A Contemporary Translation*, tr. Ahmed Ali (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), 549.

be proud of and much to be ashamed of.”<sup>618</sup> The natural audience of the apocalypticist, as Cook reminds us, is not the religious elite but the general populace.<sup>619</sup> The general populace was often already disenchanted with the religious elite. It would suffice here to quote a severe, and rather satirical, attack by Nund Rishi on the *‘ulamā* of his time:

*Mallan hangu’e phat kyāh shūbāliyi*  
*Pakān alith dālith kyeth*  
*Khōran kūnish tau’ kāsīm nāliyi*  
*Katshiy tāl trake tathil h̄yeth*<sup>620</sup>

The turbans of the *Mullahs* are like horns as big as baskets  
just look at the way they stroll about in style  
wearing expensive shoes and long dresses  
trudging with all sorts of goods under their arms

What did the apocalypticist hope to achieve through such sharp attacks on the *mullah*? Cook feels that the apocalypticist “spoke for those whose feelings did not enter into the court history books, nor into the orthodox theological tomes.”<sup>621</sup> He adds that the Muslim apocalypticist can be seen as “an early advocate of the separation between faith and state, whose conjunction is such a dominant characteristic of the Muslim polity.”<sup>622</sup> It might appear to be incongruous to impute a desire for the separation of faith and politics to a figure like Nund Rishi. Yet such themes, which emerge more clearly in relation to the Christian Reformation and the European Enlightenment, are not absent in medieval South Asia. We see across medieval South Asia attempts to challenge political power in the name of a justice grounded in a personal relation to transcendence which opens up the political to the demands of the subaltern. Such a demand to shelter faith from political

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<sup>618</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 248.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>620</sup> Rahman Rahi, “*Shaikh al ‘Ālam sanz shā‘irānā ḥaṣiyath*”, 167.

<sup>621</sup> David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 267.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*

interference could also be seen as an attempt by Nund Rishi to mediate the tensions between the new Muslim converts and Kashmir's non-Muslim population. But Nund Rishi challenged the theologico-political power of the new Kashmiri Muslim State by counterposing Qur'ānic eschatology to it.

The attack on "formal" Islam in the apocalyptic tradition is often a call for a just political order. Cook writes: "The apocalypticist is saying that the present order is not sufficient, and that this "formal" Islam has failed to bring the messianic golden age.... The call for just government was, and is today, the hallmark of every revolutionary apocalyptic and messianic Muslim group and needs to be recognized as such."<sup>623</sup> The apocalypticist, who functions as a critic of the government, often turns against "formal Islam" (by critiquing the *mullahs*, for instance!) declaring it to be corrupt.<sup>624</sup> This was often done by invoking the Islam of the Prophet's time against prevailing practices. The Sufi and the Muslim apocalypticist share common ground in their desire to return to the Islam of Prophet's time: "Things must be returned to the simple form that existed during the mythical time of the Prophet and the orthodox caliphs."<sup>625</sup> It is the simplicity of early Islam, and its radical outlook, that appeals to both the apocalypticist and the Sufi. What Nund Rishi manages to do is to translate this persistent theme of the Sufis and the Muslim apocalypticists into his own situation: a time of historical and cultural transitions in which the most vulnerable and the weakest in Kashmir were also the most at risk.<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 234-235.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>626</sup> Cook has also pointed out the connection between apocalypitics and border regions and the ambivalence towards capital cities and regions of Islam. Ibid., 254.

The Apocalyptic is as much about the present as it is about the future. The apocalypticism of Nund Rishi poses the question of the eschaton as the question of the political. A tension persists, however, between asceticism and apocalypticism in Nund Rishi's *shruks*. The two are sometimes put in relation to each other, even reduced to one another, but the problem is never resolved. The apocalyptic tone in Nund Rishi's *shruks* is best read in its historical context as it emerges at the end of an epoch at a transformative moment in Kashmir's history. There is a tension between the apocalyptic mode and an anti-apocalypticism even in the *shruks* that are in the apocalyptic mode.<sup>627</sup> Sometimes the *shruks* which aren't in the apocalyptic mode undergo an apocalyptic modulation. The apocalyptic mode in Nund Rishi should also be seen in relation to and with the rise of the *bhaktī* movement through most of North India from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century in the medieval period (during which Rishism flourished in Kashmir). The power of the apocalyptic mode in Nund Rishi comes from its having descended from a rich tradition of Islamic apocalypics (which, in turn, cannot be read in isolation from the Jewish and Christian apocalypics). The apocalyptic mode has been popular in Kashmiri mystical poetry because of its power to give meaning to Kashmiri history. My point is that Nund Rishi's apocalypticism is not born out of despair but is a call to a political rebellion, an intervention in history seen as a mere succession of empires, to correct political injustice. It is in this context that we must see both the arrest of Nund Rishi by the *Shahmīrī* Sultan and the way his disciple Zain al-Din Rishi was sent into exile in Tibet. The controversy among contemporary historians in relation to the question of Nund Rishi's arrest signals the persistence and entanglement of the questions

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<sup>627</sup> We can consider Lal Ded's *vākhs* as emblematic of such anti-apocalypticism in Kashmiri poetry.

of the political around the question of Islam in Kashmir.<sup>628</sup> The reason the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi endures in cultural memory in Kashmir owes much to his imagining of a new political epoch there. The *shruks* offer us a rich understanding of the way Nund Rishi's thinking of an imminent apocalypse is fundamental to his thinking of Islam as an apocalyptic religion that opens up these revolutionary possibilities.

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<sup>628</sup> I have here in mind the debate between the Kashmiri historians Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi and Muhammad Ishaq Khan about the early history of the Rishi movement. The disagreement even about the arrest of Nund Rishi between them (clearly cited, however, in a key text of the period!) is suggestive of the political stakes in any interpretation of Rishi history. Rafiqi in an Introduction to a new edition of his book *Sufism in Kashmir: from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century* defends his claim about Nund Rishi's arrest. See "Introduction" in Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century* (Sydney, Goodword, 2003).

## Chapter 5

### The *Sahaja* Islam of Nund Rishi

My son, may God hide from you the apparent meaning of the Law and reveal to you the truth of impiety! Because the apparent meaning of the Law is hidden impiety and the truth of impiety is manifest knowledge. Now therefore: praise to God, who manifests Himself upon the point of a needle to whomsoever He will and who hides Himself in the heavens and on the earth from whomsoever He will, with the result that one attests that “He is not” and the other attests that “There is only Him.” Neither is he who professes the negation of God rejected, nor is he who confesses his existence praised. The intent of this letter is that you explain nothing by God, that you extract not a single argumentation from him, that you desire neither to love him nor to not love him, that you do not confess his existence and that you are not inclined to deny it. And above all, refrain from proclaiming his Unity!<sup>629</sup>: Manṣūr al-Ḥallaj, cited by Michel de Certeau.

The contemporary discourses on Kashmir often turn to the idea of a Kashmiri Islam in approaching the history of religion and culture in Kashmir as unique and distinctive in South Asia.<sup>630</sup> Such notions have appealed to Kashmiris themselves and inform articulations of Islam and Muslim nationalism in Kashmir.<sup>631</sup> Even historians such as Muhammad Ishaq Khan who are critical of an understanding of Kashmir’s pasts as “syncretic” have found it difficult to reject the idea of an exclusive, even exceptional, Islam in Kashmir.<sup>632</sup> The Rishi Order of Kashmiri Sufism is fundamental to these debates about a distinctive Kashmiri Islam. The mystical poetry of Nund Rishi in the Kashmiri vernacular of the late fourteenth-fifteenth century Kashmir not only turns to metaphors, symbols and events from the Qur’ān but also relies on pre-Islamic Kashmiri cultural

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<sup>629</sup> Manṣūr al-Ḥallaj, cited in Michel de Certeau, “Mysticism,” *Diacritics* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Summer 1992): 19.

<sup>630</sup> See, for several essays which touch upon this theme, Aparna Rao and T N Madan, eds., *The valley of Kashmir: the making and unmaking of a composite culture?* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008). See also Yoginder Sikand, *The role of Kashmiri Sufis in the Promotion of Social reform and Communal Harmony, 14th-16th century* (Mumbai: Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, 1999).

<sup>631</sup> See, for instance, the essays on *Kashmīriyat*, Kashmiriness, in GM Khawaja and Gulshan Majeed, *Approaches to Kashmir Studies* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2011). See also Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Crisis of a Kashmiri Muslim: spiritual and intellectual* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2008).

<sup>632</sup> See Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* (Delhi: Manohar, 1994). A historian of Sufism in Kashmir, Muhammad Ishaq Khan’s *Kashmir’s Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* is one of the first serious book-length studies of the Rishi Order in English. Khan died in Srinagar in 2013 soon after publishing a comprehensive biographical dictionary of Sufism in Kashmir. See also Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *Sufis of Kashmir* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2011).

memory at a time when Islam was still a minority religion in Kashmir after the establishment of a Muslim ruling dynasty in 1339. The Rishi Order is recognized to have played a significant role in Kashmir's transition to Islam.<sup>633</sup> The Rishi Order is also considered vital to the claims of a distinctive Kashmiri Islam because of its retention of such pre-Islamic ascetic practices as vegetarianism, celibacy, and asceticism. The scriptural reference to non-Islamic texts and concepts as well as the admission of women to the Rishi Order of Kashmiri Sufism also make the Rishi Order distinct from the other *Shari'ah*-oriented Persianate Sufi Orders of Kashmir. The popular culture that surrounds Rishi shrines in the present such as *bhānd pāther* (Kashmiri folk theatre), *zūl* (a festival of lights), *dambāl* (dervish dance) are all associated with pre-Islamic religious culture in Kashmir.

These practices are by no means particular to Kashmir. The dervish dance, *dambāl*, is strikingly similar to the practice of *dhamāl* around the Sufi shrines of Punjab and Sindh.<sup>634</sup> The connections between vernacularisation and Sufism are also, by no means, particular to Kashmir. The early Chishti Sufis such as Bābā Farīd in Punjab and Gīsū Darāz in Deccan are known to have composed verse in Old Punjabi and Deccani. In this Chapter, I am not concerned with the question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the notion of a distinctive Kashmiri Islam or the exceptionalism of the Rishis, but the thinking of Islam articulated in the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi. Does Nund Rishi's thought and practice inaugurate, or contribute to, a Kashmiri iteration of Islamic

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<sup>633</sup> See, for instance, Muhammad Ashraf Wani, *Islam in Kashmir: Fourteenth to Sixteenth century* (Srinagar: Oriental Publishing House, 2004).

<sup>634</sup> See Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, "Dhamāl and the Performing Body: Trance Dance in the Devotional Sufi Practice of Pakistan" in *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1 (2012): 77–113.

thinking? Does Nund Rishi provincialize Islamic thinking? This question assumes even more relevance in the present where the the notion of a distinctive Kashmiri Islam is often invoked in competing political claims about the future of Kashmir. For many contemporary Islamic reformist and revivalist movements in Kashmir, such as the *Ahl-e Hadīth* and *Jamāt-e Islāmī*, Islam is universal and Nund Rishi merely articulates the meanings of a universal Islam in a Kashmiri setting. This in nutshell is also the position of the historian, Muhammad Ishaq Khan, who in his *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* calls the Rishi movement the force of change that created “conditions for the total assimilation of Kashmiris in Islam.”<sup>635</sup>

*Ahl-e Hadīth* and *Jamāt-e Islāmī* may have differing ideas on the future of Kashmir (even within these organisations there is a wide range of political positions) but both seem to be in agreement about the beginnings of Islam in Kashmir. Both Nund Rishi and Mir Sayyīd ‘Alī Hamadānī (the Kubrawiyya Sufi who settled immigrant Kubrawiyya Sufis in Kashmir) are seen in their narratives to have engaged in missionary activity to secure Kashmir for the fold of Islam. The historians Muhammad Ishaq Khan and Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi complicate this understanding in their influential books (*Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* and *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth Century to the Sixteenth Century*) but never challenge it. But this traditional Islamic reading of Nund Rishi as an Islamic missionary struggles to make sense of those moments in Nund Rishi's thinking and practice which exceed the bounds of canonical Islam, and which remain in the *shruks*.

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<sup>635</sup> Muhammad Ishaq Khan, *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis* (Delhi: Manohar, 1994), 32.

The *Jamāt-e Islāmī*, *Ahl-e Hadīth* and *Deobandī* scholars do not share the same approach to problems posed by local Sufi practices, but nonetheless anything that deviates from their revivalist Islamic understanding has come in for sharp criticism. The *Ahl-e Hadīth* reject anything that does not conform to their understanding of Islam in the light of the Qur’ān and the six canonical books of *hadīth* (collections of Prophet Muhammad’s sayings), arguing that the former should be interpreted along the terms suggested by the latter. But even the *Ahl-e Hadīth* have published posters in recent years in Kashmir that combine traditional Islamic teachings from the Qur’ān and the *hadīth* with examples from the Kashmiri *shruks* of Nund Rishi.<sup>636</sup> Even after more than half a millennium, Nund Rishi’s poetry in vernacular Kashmiri has an appeal which remains undiminished beyond sectarian and religious denominations. Not only have phrases and idioms from his mystical poetry become a part of everyday Kashmiri, new editions of his mystical poetry appear every year. But the *Ahl-e Hadīth* in Kashmir deploy only those of Nund Rishi’s *shruks* which conform to their understanding of the *Sunnah* (the way, or practice, of the Prophet Muhammad). *Jamāt-e-Islāmī* in Kashmir does not approach Sufism with the same degree of severity but remains critical of tomb shrine cults and local practices at odds with the *Sharī’ah*. *Jamāt-e-Islāmī* also favours a non-confrontational approach to Sufi belief and practice and even creates space for an understanding of classical, and pietistic, Sufism. A senior leader of *Jamāt-e-Islāmī*, Qāri Saif al-Dīn, has even published a book on Nund Rishi in which he presents him as a

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<sup>636</sup> Personal collection. The *Jamī’at-e Ahl-e Hadīth* in Kashmir claims hundreds of thousands of members all over Kashmir and is a strong religio-political movement even though it maintains a distance from contemporary politics in Kashmir. This has been a reason for dissension within the ranks of the *Ahl-e Hadīth* in Kashmir and the rise of smaller groups like *Şawt al-Ĥaq*. One of the senior leaders of the movement, Maulana Showkat Ahmad Shah, was assassinated in Srinagar in 2011.

leader of Islamic thinking (*mufakkir*) in Kashmir.<sup>637</sup> It is significant to note that the polemic against the Sufis, common to some of these modern Islamic revivalist movements is more restrained in Kashmir, because it is the Sufis who are seen locally as being responsible for the conversions to Islam in Kashmir. Even though conversions to Islam by Nund Rishi figure prominently in the hagiographical literature, there is very little understanding of the missionary work of the Rishis themselves as such. If the Islamic revivalist movements are anxious to situate Nund Rishi as an early reformer of Islam in Kashmir, some Sufi-oriented Barelvī groups see Nund Rishi as not only opposed to forms of orthodoxy and orthopraxy but as an early exemplar of devotional Islam in South Asia. These groups are not at all anxious about shrine veneration and other practices associated with Sufism in Kashmir, and do not consider these to be pre-Islamic. For example, the Barelvī theology connects shrine veneration in South Asia to Sunni theology. But the stakes of reading Nund Rishi do not merely involve interpreting the history of Islam in Kashmir. The Kashmiri nationalists, for instance, see Nund Rishi as one of the first Kashmiri spiritual leaders to express the national sentiment of the oppressed in Kashmir.<sup>638</sup> The Indian State, in turn, promotes Nund Rishi's Sufism as an

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<sup>637</sup> *Jamāt-e Islāmī Kashmir* has a history separate from *Jamāt-e Islāmī Hind* of India and *Jamāt-e Islāmī Pakistan* of Pakistan even though the thinking and politics of *Jamāt-e Islāmī Pakistan* has had a greater influence over the *Jamāt-e Islāmī Kashmir*. For a wider history of *Jamāt-e Islāmī* and its revivalist politics in South Asia, see Irfan Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). For a history of the *Jamāt-e Islāmī* in Kashmir, see Yoginder Sikand, "The Emergence and Development of the Jama'at-i Islami of Jammu and Kashmir (1940s-1990s)," *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2002). See also Mushtaq Ahmad Wani, *Muslim religious trends in Kashmir in modern times* (Patna: Khuda Baksh Oriental Public Library, 1997).

<sup>638</sup> The leader of the largest pro-independence Kashmiri nationalist group Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Yasin Malik begins many of his political addresses with a *shruk* from Nund Rishi.

instance of what it calls *Kashmīriyat*, an ethos of tolerance and coexistence, which in its official expressions bears a striking resemblance to the Indian ideology of secularism.<sup>639</sup>

Reading Nund Rishi in the present is nothing less than reading Islam in a regional setting at a time when contestations over Sufism and Islam are no longer confined to academic debates but involve critical stakes in relation to an understanding of Muslim societies from the Middle East and North Africa to South and South East Asia. The shrine at the Charar tomb-complex of Nund Rishi remains the focal point of devotion to Nund Rishi in Kashmir and attracts not only Muslims but also Hindus and Sikhs. The heterodox appeal of Nund Rishi across different Islamic and non-Islamic traditions in Kashmir partly owes to the historical memory of the saint but also to the way different religious traditions are gathered together in the mystical poetry that circulates in his name. Nund Rishi also remains connected in folklore, oral history, and cultural memory at large to his older contemporary Shaiva *yoginī*, Lal Ded. Nund Rishi invokes the spiritual station of Lal Ded as the one to which he himself aspires in the following *shruk*:

*Tas Padmānpor chi lale*  
*Tami gale 'y amrit pivo*  
*Tami Shiva vuch thale thale*  
*Tyuth mye var dito divo*<sup>640</sup>

That Lalla of Padmanpore  
The one who drank the nectar  
The one who kept gazing at Shiva  
God, give me a gift like that!

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<sup>639</sup> See Balraj Puri, “Kashmīriyat: The vitality of Kashmiri identity” in *Contemporary South Asia* Vol 4 (1) 1995: 55-63. See also Neil Aggarwal, “Kashmīriyat as empty signifier” in *Interventions* 10:2 (2008): 222-235. See also Chitralekha Zutshi, “Kashmir and Kashmīriyat: The Politics of Diversity in South Asia” in *Heterotopias: Nationalism and the possibility of history in South Asia*, ed. Manu Bhagavan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>640</sup> Moti Lal Saqī, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 148.

Here in this *shruk*, which is from a longer poem which invokes Kashmir's legendary spiritual masters, Nund Rishi remarkably addresses God in Kashmiri as *divo* (from the Indo-Aryan *deiwos*), which is in turn taken from the Sanskrit, *devá* (divine being). The spiritual attainment of Lal Ded is likened by Nund Rishi to drinking the *amrita* (nectar) which, in the Hindu tradition, conferred immortality to the gods. In many of Nund Rishi's *shruks*, God himself is used interchangeably with *Shiva*, one of the main gods of the Hindu pantheon. Not only does this *shruk* involve an act of translation from Hinduism to Islam in the religious register but also a vernacularization of the classical Hindu and Islamic traditions.

The way Nund Rishi engages with the Hindu and Buddhist tradition in Kashmir gives us an unusual access to the thinking of faith and practice in medieval Kashmir and also makes it possible to question the figure of Islam that rises to the surface in contemporary Kashmiri discourses about identity and nation; the public discourses of secularism in Indian and Kashmiri nationalism; and, discourses of an inherently tolerant Kashmiri Islam, or an inherently tolerant Islam, which inform variants of Kashmiri nationalism and Islamism in Kashmir. Even though a concept of a faith that is universal (or the desire for such a concept) in Kashmir informs the contemporary discourses on Islam in Kashmir, as well as the mystical poetry of Lal Ded and Nund Rishi, we do not come across any clear articulation of a universal faith at the imagined 'origin' of these discourses in either Nund Rishi or Lal Ded. But there are *translations* between Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic registers as well as Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Kashmiri. What then does Islam mean for Nund Rishi? This question is particularly significant because

nowhere does a notion of Kashmiri Islam appear in Nund Rishi's *shruks*. I will read the thinking of Islam in Nund Rishi from his negotiations of the question of the *Sharī'ah*, controversies around Sufism and such Sufi martyrs as Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj but also in relation to his attitude towards Hinduism and Buddhism. We will begin with the long poem with the refrain *Suy du'pze Musalmān (He alone is a true Muslim)* for the reason that it explicitly addresses the question of who is or is not a Muslim. Our reading of this poem situates Nund Rishi in relation to the politics of questioning the name (and naming) of the Muslim, in medieval South Asia, in such figures as the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, and Kabir. The trope of a true Muslim, or a true Sufi, persists across religious traditions in South Asia against orthodox approaches to Islam and as a political challenge to Muslim rulers of South Asia. The binary of Sufism and *Sharī'ah* to be found in the scholarship on Islam in South Asia is a useful device to help clarify the stakes of a poem such as *Suy du'pze Musalmān (He alone is a true Muslim)*.

The new Sultanate of Kashmir had to deal with the pressures from the immigrant Sufis and the *'ulamā* to implement the *Sharī'ah* and press the cause of Islam in the predominantly non-Muslim Kashmiri environment. It is against this background that Nund Rishi approaches Islam from the emotional and political register of the Kashmiri vernacular by turning the idea of the Muslim itself into a question. This is a move the Rishi movement shared with the Sufis and *bhakti* saints of North India which was then under the rule of another Muslim Sultanate. The Islam of Nund Rishi is the practice and ethics of a self-transformation which is also the call for a new political order. Not only then does Islam, in this iteration, resemble the revolution of early Islam but it also is held

in a relation to pre-Islamic asceticisms in Kashmir. Here, I explore the meanings of Islam for Nund Rishi in his approach to such questions as the *Sharī'ah* (Islamic Law) which had become quite contentious in medieval Kashmir but also in his turn to such controversial figures of Sufi history as Manṣūr al-Hallaj, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and Uways al-Qarnī.

The “true Muslim” is a trope in vernacular Sufi poetry of South Asia just as the “true Sufi” emerges as a trope in Sufism signaling an intense contestation of these terms in the medieval period. From its beginnings, the history of Islam is marked by this struggle over “true Islam” and “true Sufism.” What is at stake in these struggles over the “true” is the truth of spirituality. But this history of questioning spills over into other spiritual movements in North India where the question of a “true Muslim” also marks its appearance in the Sikh religious tradition. By no means, this accent was peculiar to Sufism: Islamic theology makes a distinction between a *Muslim* (the one who surrenders) and a *momin* (a Believer). In Islamic theology, a Muslim need not be a *momin* but a *momin* is always a Muslim. This concern with the “true Muslim,” and therefore a “true Islam,” is also consistent with the rise of regional and transregional Muslim imperial power in medieval South Asia. The “true Muslim,” which stand in for “true Islam,” becomes the empty signifier the figure of which establishes equivalence between competing claims about Islam and politics in the Muslim Sultanates of medieval North India. Not only are the imperial attitudes to Sufism and theology at stake in these debates but also the relation of the new Muslim power in North India to the non-Muslim majority in India, the new Muslim converts and the peasantry.

Even though Nund Rishi unambiguously situates himself within the Islamic tradition (this is also the fundamental argument made by the historian Muhammad Ishaq Khan in his influential *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of the Muslim Rishis*), consistent with the Sunni orthodoxy which he affirms in his *shruks*, he also turns to Islam as a question. The form in which Islam appears as a question in Nund Rishi's thinking in the Kashmiri vernacular is what makes it distinctive. My point is that the thinking and practice of Islam in Kashmir is distinctive in these acts of translation which neither begin nor end with Nund Rishi. But he and his work is a figure around which coheres an idea of translating, even deconstructing, Islam in Kashmir. This is what enables Nund Rishi to found the Rishi movement as a Kashmiri Sufi Order and why it endures in Kashmiri cultural memory. The *shruks* inherit an unfolding tradition of thinking on Islam in Sufism, of its political failures and its eschatological promise, but in a language which is in a relation to its own historicity. The *shruk* is the site of an encounter, a fragment, that gives us a privileged access to a break in the Kashmiri past.

Let us turn now to the question of Islam as Nund Rishi addresses it in his narrative poem, *Suy du'pze Musalmān (He alone is a true Muslim)*. B. N. Parimoo writes that the Kashmiri *tazkirāhs* (a genre of texts that collects biographies of poets and Sufis with examples from their works) suggest that Nund Rishi's poem answered a direct question posed to him about his idea of a Muslim.<sup>641</sup> The question was addressed to Nund Rishi by a Brahmin convert to Islam who also became the scribe of Nund Rishi.<sup>642</sup> I

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<sup>641</sup> B. N. Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1984), 161.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

quote here the complete poem from the Moti Lal Saqi edition of the collected poems of

Nund Rishi:

*Angu' yas khosh bə'e məkhu' zan vude  
Nishi vudyen baq gath hÿeth āsmān  
Səstū' kreyi tu' rostue krode  
Suy du'pze Musalmān*

*Dū'thchi kāmi kar vuḍāli  
Āsyēs nanzaru'ch sakal kāmān  
Tsyeth kisaru' yavu' madu' vāli  
Tsāli gob vacun tu' avmān  
Yiy paras paru'ni ti pānas pāli  
Suy du'pze Musalmān*

*Su purəshah swərgas prave  
Yas ahar chu beyan sān  
Ru'tÿen dohan yus rozu' thāve  
Āsi yavu' vāsith navi namān  
Krod lob moh mad ahankār trave  
Suy du'pze Musalmān*

*Pānas məl kari nu' hāre  
Sū't beyis kari nu' mānas mān  
Dərgan trāvith sozan gāre  
Rātas dohas dāre dyān  
Par tu' pān yus sodras tāre  
Suy du'pze Musalmān*

*Beyis dəp sham vakhni  
Pānas bronth ani īmān  
Beyis nazar kari nu' hāni  
Āsi nu' danu' dīshith bramān  
Vāre paki tu' shara' zāni  
Suy du'pze Musalmān*

*Andvan nīrith pand yem hyetsu'e  
Sətsu'e logun panun jān  
Yamī yad gənd tu' tsyed tāmī hyetsu'e  
Myetsu'e vyondun panun pān  
Andkun ru'hith bari yamī phyetsu'e  
Suy du'pze Musalmān<sup>643</sup>*

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<sup>643</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam*, 175-76.

His body fragrant and mind as incense  
Meditating on the sayings of the wise  
Right action, free of anger  
He alone is a true Muslim

One who does not turn away from everyday labour  
One who has a desire to work for an honest living  
One who can control the mad passions of the ego  
One who is tolerant of harsh speech and humiliation  
One who practices what he preaches to others  
He alone is a true Muslim

He will attain heaven  
Who shares his food with the others  
And fasts for nights and days  
He who bends low  
He who leaves anger, greed, attachment, pride  
He alone is a true Muslim

One who does not value himself at a cowrie  
One who does not compete with the others  
One who searches for the good and abandons the evil  
One who is mindful in the day and at night  
One who ferries the self and the other across the ocean  
He alone is a true Muslim

One who discourses to others  
Only that which he believes himself  
One who does not covet what belongs to others  
One who does not get tempted when he sees wealth  
One who walks steadfastly and knows the path of the *Sharī'ah*  
He alone is a true Muslim

The one who leaves the forest for the village  
The one who commits to the search for truth  
The one who controls his appetites and acts with patience  
The one who commits himself to dust  
The one who retreats inwards and closes the doors  
He alone is a true Muslim

The ideas expressed in this poem are strikingly similar to those of the Sikh guru, Guru Nanak (1469-1539), who was born in neighboring Punjab within thirty years of Nund Rishi's death in the realm of the Chishti saints. If one reads the above poem in parallel with Guru Nanak's hymns about being a "true Muslim," there is a striking similarity between the two approaches to the question of a "true Muslim." Let us consider the following *shloka* from *Vār Mājḥ*:

Make mercy your mosque and devotion your prayer mat,  
righteousness your Qur'an;  
Meekness your circumcising, goodness your fasting,  
for thus the true Muslim expresses his faith.  
Make good works your Ka'bah, take truth as your pir,  
compassion your creed and your prayer.  
Let service to God be the beads which you tell  
and God will exalt you to glory<sup>644</sup>

In Nund Rishi's poem, the Muslim is the subject of a self-transformation and not necessarily a member of a particular religious community: he or she meditates on the sayings of the wise and is free of anger. There is a strong stress on honest living and patience when confronted with aggression. A Muslim is also one who practices what he preaches: he shares his food and resources with others and turns his back on anger, greed, attachment, and pride. We also see the development of these ideas in Muslim North India also with the rise of the Chishti Sufi Order in the twelfth century. But what is significant about Nund Rishi is that he does not use any of the Sufi technical terms for expressing his idea of a "true Muslim" but instead turns to Sanskrit concepts of *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moh* (attachment), *ahankār* (pride), and *mad* (lust). The terms are significant in the Sikh tradition and are also used by the Chishti Sufi of the Punjab, Baba Farīd, also

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<sup>644</sup> W. H. McLeod, *The Sikhs: History, Religion, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 28.

venerated in the Sikh tradition. But Nund Rishi significantly also emphasizes the *Sharī'ah* and considers a “true Muslim” as someone who has turned his back on the path to the forest, and hence of total renunciation, and returns to the village, a public community. Yet this is not a total rejection of asceticism. Nund Rishi ends the poem by calling a “true Muslim” someone who retreats inwards to strive for the truth in patience and through constant remembrance of one’s mortality.

The poem is striking as it reveals that the question of who is and is not a good Muslim was a concern in the fourteenth and fifteenth-century Kashmir. The question also appears in an Indo-Persian climate where the question of who is or is not a Sufi was already significant. From its beginnings, Sufism emerges entangled with the question of its relation to *Sharī'ah* and political power. But these developments had acquired an unusual intensity with the deepening of the crisis in the Muslim world after the Mongol attacks on Eastern and Central Islamic lands as well as such traumatic events as the hanging of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj by the Caliphate in 922 CE. Even if the question of the *Sharī'ah* was at stake in the Manṣūr affair, the developments were also tied to questions of political power, which we discuss greater detail below. Nothing less than the meaning of Islam was at stake, and it is in this atmosphere that Ḥallāj’s martyrdom is supposed to have, as the Sufis often assert, renewed the Islamic faith.

The line “*Suy du 'pze Musalmān*” can also be translated as “Only such a person is a Muslim.” Nund Rishi connects Islam to a necessary askesis marked by a lack of anger (*krod*, or *krodha*) and the possession of right thoughts combined with right action. There is also a strong insistence on depending on one’s own labour. Much like the Chishti Sufi

Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nagauri, Nund Rishi advocated and practiced farming. The *Kubrawiyya* Sufis in Kashmir had also educated people in different arts, crafts, and skills for livelihood. But they differed from the Rishis in their approach to non-Muslims (the *Kubrawiyya* practiced Shafī‘i school of Islamic jurisprudence which, unlike the Hanafi school, is stricter on the question of the relations to non-Muslims). For Nund Rishi, the “true Muslim” is in control of the passions of the ego and practices only what he or she preaches. The stress is on ‘*amal* (practice, or action).

In the third *shruk* of this poem, Nund Rishi warns that only such a Muslim shall attain Paradise who shares his food with others and who prays and fasts night and day. A true Muslim gives up *krod* (rage), *lobh* (greed), *moh* (attachment), *mad* (ego) and *ahankār* (pride). The true Muslim does not think much of him or herself and avoids competing with others. Rather in constant search of the good, in *dyān*, or *dhyāna* (mindfulness), day and night, the true Muslim must help self and the other cross the ocean of life. The true Muslim must only preach what he practices himself and he should never covet the other’s property. The true Muslim is not tempted by wealth and steadfastly moves on the straight path of the *Sharī‘ah*. The true Muslim also does not isolate himself or herself from human community but searches for the truth within human community, controls the appetites of the *nafs* (ego), and never forgets his mortality.

But despite living in the community, Nund Rishi’s true Muslim retains an inwardness and shuts the door to the world outside. But what is remarkable about this poem is that Nund Rishi finds cognates such as *mad* (lust) or *ahankār* (pride) for the workings of the Qur’ānic *nafs* (blameworthy ego) and attempts a translation of Sufi

technical terminology into the vernacular Kashmiri.<sup>645</sup> The true Muslim that Nund Rishi speaks of here not only resembles the Sufi in a Kashmiri setting (like the Chishtis and Suhrawardis of the Hind and Sindh) but also the God-fearing early Islamic mystics such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Sahl b. ‘Abdullah Tūstārī.

Even though we sense the fear of God, and the fear of encountering God in death, as the dominant strain in Nund Rishi, he also invokes the figures of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Jalāl al-Dīn Rumi and Uways al-Qarnī. The ecstatic Sufism of al-Ḥallāj is not as unrestrained here. Nor is the asceticism of Uways al-Qarnī as extreme. Even though there is an affirmation of the legacy of al-Ḥallāj, and a discomfort with political power, there are few ecstatic utterances (*shath*) in Nund Rishi. Rather the tone and tenor of Nund Rishi’s mystical poetry is strikingly similar to that of early Chishti Sufis such as Baba Farīd.<sup>646</sup> The approach to political power is also cautious like that of the Chishtis. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to speculate on the relationship between the Sufis of the Delhi Sultanate under the Tughlaqs and the Sufis in the new Kashmir Sultanate but the attitudes of the Rishis to the Kashmiri Sultanate bear a striking resemblance to those of the Chishtis to the Sultans of Delhi. Even though there is no consistent pattern to this relationship, both the Chishtis and the Rishis laid stress on their independence from the Sultan and his Court. Yet both the Chishtis and the Rishis were also appropriated by the Sultanate for its own ends.

The retreat to an inner experience in Islamic mysticism at its beginnings cannot be isolated from the political failures of the medieval Caliphate. Nund Rishi searched for

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<sup>645</sup> There is a gap between the Qur’ānic meanings of this term and its use in Sufi technical terminology.

<sup>646</sup> It perhaps comes as no surprise then that the Kashmiri literary critic, Rahman Rahi, who has written two of the most influential essays on Nund Rishi, also translated Baba Farīd from Punjabi to Kashmiri.

a new language and politics that could help circumvent the tension between a *Sharī'ah* - oriented Sufism and Hindu-Buddhist elements in the thinking and practice of Islam in Kashmir. The situation was very little different from the Delhi Sultanate, where the Sultans adopted a pragmatic approach to governance but yet could not alienate the theologians demanding for a strict implementation of the *Sharī'ah*. Sultan Iltutmish, for instance, had to defer the demands for the implementation of the *Sharī'ah* in the thirteenth-century Delhi Sultanate. It is these tensions which would force the celebrated *Kubrāwīyyā* saint, Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani, to leave Kashmir only after a short stay of three to four years.<sup>647</sup> A reading of the correspondence of Mīr Sayyīd 'Alī Hamadānī to the Kashmiri Sultan after his departure from Kashmir clearly reveals the differences in their approach to the question of the *Sharī'ah*.<sup>648</sup> The Kashmiri Sultans venerated Mīr Sayyid Alī Hamadānī, the great Kubrawīyya Sufi, but much like Sultan Iltutmish in Delhi, they could do little about his demand to implement the *Sharī'ah*. Nund Rishi complicates our understanding of the *Sharī'ah*, and the meanings of the fundamentals of Islamic faith, by approaching these questions in the vernacular and from the loci of the everyday. Nund Rishi grounds his thinking in the Qur'ānic technical language but almost always by first translating it into the vernacular. It is in this act of translation that Nund Rishi finds his own voice as a thinker and a poet at the cusp of the Hindu-Muslim encounter in medieval Kashmir. For more than 500 years after the advent of Islam in seventh century Arabia, the Sufis of the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia had

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<sup>647</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (Sydney: Goodword Media, 2003), 44, 49.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 48-49. See also Letter no. 7 addressed to Sultan 'Alau'd-Din in Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Letters of Mir Saiyid Ali Hamadani* (Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2007), 60-61.

evolved a language Qur'ānic in origin but concerned with the practices of self-transformation which resembled pre-Islamic religious practice in all of these regions (Christianity in the Middle East, Buddhism in Central Asia, and Hinduism in South Asia). Nund Rishi shifts effortlessly between Islamic and Hindu-Buddhist registers in speaking of these processes of the transformation of the self. This is quite clear in a line like *Nafs myon chu mad hosto* (My *nafs* is like a mad elephant). Here Nund Rishi speaks of the condition of the desiring self (*nafs al-ammāra*, in Qur'ānic terms) as that of the elephant in a state of must which invokes the legend of the Buddha's encounter with a mad elephant. Nund Rishi calls the *nafs* the tortured, mad elephant that the Buddha tames in a single glance with his compassion.

Let us return to the poem above about who is and is not a true Muslim. A striking thing about one of the *shruks* in the poem, and some other *shruks* by Nund Rishi, is that Nund Rishi also considers the Muslim as the one who knows the *Sharī'ah*. But Nund Rishi is quick to complicate this understanding of the *Sharī'ah* by comparing it to a good pathway. Nund Rishi uses the Kashmiri idiom, *Vāru' pakun*, to walk well (or to stay on the good path), to invoke the etymological meaning of the *Sharī'ah* as the simple and straight path (to water).<sup>649</sup> The *Sharī'ah* is the same root which gives us words like *shāra* (or road). The walking path also emerges in another *shruk* by Nund Rishi: *Pakān pakān pakān gos* (I kept on, kept on, walking). This endless walking is also at the same time the simple path. The world of medieval Hindu and Muslim mysticism in South Asia

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<sup>649</sup> See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Rahman writes: "This word originally means 'the path or the road leading to the water', i.e. a way to the very source of life. The verb *shara'a* means literally 'to chalk out or mark out a clear road to water. In its religious usage from the earliest period, it has meant 'the highway of good life', i.e. religious values, expressed functionally and in concrete terms, to direct man's life." Ibid.

had a unique term for the simple yet blissful: *sahaja*. Nund Rishi returns us to the origins of the meaning of the *Sharī'ah* by speaking of it as the *sahaja* path.<sup>650</sup> Nund Rishi does not use the term *sahaja vath* (*sahaja* path) but he calls the Qur'ān the “*sahaja* Qur'ān.”<sup>651</sup>.

The figure of Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) helps us situate the uneasy truce between what has often been called the ecstatic and the sober approaches to Sufism which in turn are related to a less and more orthodox approach to the *Sharī'ah*. Such Sufis as Bāyazīd Bestāmī and Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj had come under severe criticism for their utterances that appeared to challenge the *Sharī'ah*. But in fifteenth-century Kashmir, much after the tragic denouement of these tensions in the martyrdom of a Sufi such as Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, the Sufis generally reiterated their commitment to the *Sharī'ah* and the ecstatic approaches were exiled into *dervish* orders, which in South Asia blended in with other ascetic traditions. Nonetheless it is interesting how Nund Rishi reads the *Sharī'ah* as a path and in another of his *shruks* as *soth* (the embankment). Nund Rishi accuses Maṣṣūr of endangering the river embankment: *Sharahkis sothis sīrah wājīn* (He hurled a brick at the dam of *Sharī'ah*).<sup>652</sup> It is not only dangerous to breach the banks, but a river without banks is unthinkable. In his *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian environment*, Aziz Ahmad argues that nowhere was the tension between Sufism and *Sharī'ah* as resolved as it was in medieval South Asia:

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<sup>650</sup> Interestingly Moti Lal Saqi, who edited the second most influential collection of *shruks* by Nund Rishi, and spent the last years of his life away from Kashmir in exile, called his autobiography, *Sahaja vath* (The Sahaja Path).

<sup>651</sup> If the term *sahaja* had entered the vernacular Sufi poetry in Kashmir, the Jewish and Islamic term *dīn* for faith appears in the hymns of Guru Nanak. I will discuss this particular *shruk* and the concept of the *sahaja* in some more detail towards the end of this Chapter.

<sup>652</sup> We shall examine the whole *shruk* below. Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 90.

In Islamic religious history the tension between the religious assertion of the transcendence of God and the mystical aspiration for His immanence was perhaps nowhere more thoroughly resolved to a middle of the road position than in India where Islam was propagated mainly by Sufis with a firm emphasis on the observance of the tenets of the *shari'at*.<sup>653</sup>

But India too had its Sufi martyrs who challenged the *Sharī'ah* in the Chishti Sufi Mas'ud Bakk and in the Jewish-Armenian-Muslim Sufi Sarmad (the latter executed at the orders of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb).

Nund Rishi unambiguously states that *Sharī'ah* is fundamental to the possibility of a spiritual transformation that he calls becoming a true Muslim. But at the same time, he complicates our understanding of the *Sharī'ah* as that which is the condition of possibility of this process of self-transformation, a *soth* (bank) to the river of *'amal* (action). This is an approach to the Sufism-*Sharī'ah* question which has had an enduring and powerful impact on Islam in South Asia. Yet the reconciliation between Sufism and *Sharī'ah* appears as a problem as late as the twentieth century in the Deobandi school of Islamic theology in South Asia. As early as the fourteenth century in Kashmir, Sufism and *Sharī'ah* are no longer seen in opposition, but as complementing each other in ways which are not always apparent (there are differences in the ways Sufis of different Orders approach the relationship between Sufism and *Sharī'ah* but the relation remains fundamental to their thinking). A radical departure from this approach has to wait until the rise of the so-called Wahhabi movement in nineteenth-century India, which exhibits less and less tolerance for the Hindu influence on Sufism, and increasingly lays stress on

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<sup>653</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic culture in the Indian Environment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 131. Ahmad turns to the Sufi text *Kashf al-mahjub* by al-Hujwiri to trace this “integration of religious law and mysticism in India” to the eleventh century which is also the time al-Ghazali addresses these tensions in his *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*: “The exoteric aspect of Truth without the esoteric is hypocrisy, and the esoteric without the exoteric is heresy. So with regard to the Law mere formality is defective, while mere spirituality is vain.” Ibid.

the *Sharī'ah*. The Sufi tendencies that contravened the *Sharī'ah* found themselves pushed to the space of dervish traditions in South Asia which had evolved in a heterodox environment (for instance, the shrine of the dervish Lāl Shāhbāz Qalandar in Sindh emerged close to a Shaivite site where annual celebrations also involved Shaivite practices). But even here in the dervish traditions at the margins of Sufism in South Asia, a distinction was made between the *bā shara'* (with *Sharī'ah*) and *be shara'* (without *Sharī'ah*) dervishes.

The tension in fifteenth-century Kashmir is not only one between Sufism and *Sharī'ah* but also about approaches to the *Sharī'ah* in different Sufi Orders such as the *Kubrāwiyya* and the Rishis. The historian Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi gives us a detailed account of these tensions in his influential *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*.<sup>654</sup> Rafiqi writes: “The political activities of immigrant Sufis and their Kashmiri followers appeared to the Rishīs essentially contradictory to Sufism as they understood it.”<sup>655</sup> Even though Muhammad Ishaq Khan resists this interpretation of Sufi history in the early days of the Sultanate, it is largely because he refuses to admit any possibility of tensions between the different Sufi Orders of the time. But even in the account of the history of Sufism in Kashmir in his *Kashmir's Transition to Islam: the Role of Muslim Rishis*, we can discern signs of tension between the *Kubrāwiyya* and the Rishis in the fifteenth century and the *Suhrāwardiyyā* and the Rishis in the sixteenth century. A case in point are the tensions between the *Kubrāwiyyā* and *Nurbakhsīyyā* in Kashmir in the

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<sup>654</sup> Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (Sydney: Goodword Media, 2003), 247-48.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid.

sixteenth century but remain beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>656</sup> Here we discern another powerful parallel between the Chishtis of Hindustan and the Deccan Sultanates on the one hand and the Rishis of the Kashmir Sultanate on the other. The Chishtis, for instance, differed with the *Suhrawardiyyā* not only on the question of the relations to political power and accumulation of wealth but also such sensitive *Sharī‘ah*-related questions as the permissibility of the use of music in Sufi gatherings. Much like the Chishtis, the Rishis also remained open to disciples regardless of caste, class, religion or gender (the only exception is the use of music). Perhaps it is for this reason that the Chishti Order did not spread into Kashmir: Kashmir already had its own Chishti movement in the form of Rishism. From the Rishi *tadhkirāhs*, it becomes clear that the Rishis condemned close ties to political power, and this also reminds us of the troubled existence of the Chishtis in the Sultanate period. The reconciliation with the *Suhrawardīs* or the ways in which Nund Rishi speaks of the *Sharī‘ah*, suggest that these tensions were not only about the role of the *Sharī‘ah* but also in relation to the different approaches to the *Sharī‘ah* itself. This also recalls the attitude of the Chishti Sufis, who did not oppose the *Sharī‘ah* in relation to such practices as the *sama‘* (listening to music) but interpreted the *Sharī‘ah* in a way that deemed the *sama‘* practice as legal. Thus the tensions between different Sufi Orders in medieval South Asia often also revolved around the relations between the *Sharī‘ah*-minded *‘ulamā* and the Sufis. For instance, Nund Rishi often endorses the *Sharī‘ah*, but at the same time he is unsparing and relentless in his criticism of *mullāhs*, the religious clergy. The critique of the *mullahs* is a trope of Persian and Arabic Sufi

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<sup>656</sup> For a detailed study of the tensions between the *Kubrāwiyyā* and *Nurbakhsīyyā*, see Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakhsīyā between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

poetry that persists in Muslim literary cultures of South Asia as late as the twentieth century (the seventeenth century Mughal Prince, Dara Shikoh, calls Paradise a place free of the *mullāhs*). But the critique of the *mullāh* in Nund Rishi emerges in relation to the uneasy relations between the new Persian immigrants and the new Kashmiri converts to Islam: it reveals a tension between settler Sufis and local ones. Let us return to a *shruk* that I have cited:

*Nyebrae shubu'l, andrau' shūmī*  
*Minbaran khasan tu' qar qar kār*  
*Malle hai dapzi hai tu' Molvi Rūmī*  
*Natu' Malle dīshith istghfār*<sup>657</sup>

Pleasing on the outside, rotten on the inside  
 They sermonize from the pulpit after evil deeds  
 If you do want to speak of a *Mullāh*, it is Maulana Rumi  
 Or else seek God's refuge if you sight a *Mullāh*

The example of Rumi is not merely incidental. There is a sharp critique of the fake *mullāhs* in Rumi who stressed the inner dimensions of Islam over external piety and ceremonial observance. Rumi himself had trained in Islamic sciences such as the study of the *hadīth* and the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) but distrusted the privileging of theological knowledge as opposed to the Sufi path of love. Even though there emerged a consensus on the relation between inner or esoteric Sufism and the outer or exoteric *Sharī'ah* among the Sufis, the tensions between Sufis and the orthodox *'ulamā* persisted in Islamic history. One consequence of these tensions was the assertion of Sunni orthodoxy in Central Asian and South Asian Sufism, which reached its apogee in the sixteenth century with the Naqshbandī Sufi, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī writing a treatise against Shi'ism. We

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<sup>657</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'* (Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, 1966), 183.

also see Nund Rishi affirm Sunni orthodoxy in many of his *shruks* but he never takes an explicit anti-Shi‘i stand. Let us take, for instance, the following *shruk*:

*Hazrat Siddīqas tas durdānas*  
*Yus awwal hyot sāhiban pānas sāt*  
*Umari Khattāb-as pahalwānas*  
*Yem jang kor shaitānas sāt*  
*Hazrat Usmānas ibni ‘Affānas*  
*Yem kath qar furqānas sāt*  
*Hazrat Shāhas sher-e yazdānas*  
*Yem tsot kheyi mahmānas sāt*  
*Rasūli khudāyas shāh-e sultānas*  
*Yus ‘ummat panin heyi pānas sāt*  
*Nund Ryosh arz kari Shah-e Hamdānas*  
*Tatīy jannatas h̄yetam pānas sāt*<sup>658</sup>

To the Sidiq (the Truthful One), that Pearl  
The One who the Master took along as the first friend  
To Umar ibn Khattab, the Strong One  
The One who fought the Satan  
To Uthman ibn Affan  
The One who spoke to the Qur’ān  
To the King, The Lion of Yazdan  
The one who broke bread with the stranger  
To the Prophet of God, the king of kings  
The one who will shield his community  
Nund Rishi appeals to Shah-e Hamadān  
In heaven, keep me close to you

Here Nund Rishi offers salutations and praise to the first caliph of Islam (Abū Bakr) followed by the second (‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb), the third (Uthmān ibn al-‘Affān) and the fourth caliph (Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib) and then praise to the Prophet Muhammad. But Nund Rishi ends with an appeal to Shāh-e Hamadān (“the King of Hamadan”), Mīr Sayyīd Alī Hamādānī, the *Kubrāwīyyā* saint from Hamadān, who visited Kashmir shortly before his death in 1371 with hundreds of his followers (seven hundred, according to popular

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<sup>658</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam*, 36.

Kashmiri belief) and whose son, Mīr Muḥammad Hamādanī, played a significant role in the consolidation of Islam in Kashmir: Nund Rishi hopes for the companionship of Shah-e Hamadan in Paradise. Regardless of whether this is a later interpolation to ease differences between the two Orders (the local Rishi and the foreign *Kubrāwiyyā*) or a *shruk* by Nund Rishi himself, it nonetheless points to a certain asymmetry between the Rishis and the Persian Sufis. The affirmation of the early Caliphate situates Nund Rishi within orthodox Sunni pietism that considers the rule of all the first four Caliphs as rightly-guided and legitimate.

The presence of this and similar *shruks* in the Nund Rishi corpus indicates a general anxiety about Shi‘ism in the region which was to develop into a fundamental political concern by the sixteenth-century and led key Naqshbandī and Suharwadī Sufis of Kashmir to appeal to Mughal imperial power to intervene in a Kashmir then ruled by the Shi‘i Chak dynasty. Let us turn to another *shruk* reinforcing this allegiance to Sunni orthodoxy:

*Muhammad tu' tsor yār bar haq gānzrakh*  
*Timan nish andī dīnuk nyae*  
*Jān pān panun timan path bānzrakh*  
*Sōy che tor kits bād rahkāe*  
*Anis athe wāl pā'e kithe sayzrakh*  
*Yamāthanu' varzakh pīru' su'nz jāe*<sup>659</sup>

If you take the path of Muhammad and the four friends as true  
 You will be able to seek an end to your spiritual search  
 If you sacrifice your life and wealth for them  
 This is the only true investment for the future  
 You will not be able to find the right path  
 As long as you don't do justice to the station of your teacher

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<sup>659</sup> Ibid., 30.

The call to inherit “the station of the teacher” is also an appeal not to challenge the Sunni consensus. Nund Rishi’s attitude is far from anti-*Shī‘ī* unlike later *Suwardī* texts from Kashmir but it nonetheless affirms Sunni orthodoxy. It is easier to see now why Nund Rishi is spared the polemical attacks from such Islamic revivalists in Kashmir as the *Jamāt-e Islāmī*, *Ahl-e Hadīth* and *Deobandīs*. Most of these revivalist movements proceeded by accommodating of pious Sufism as long as it did not appear to contradict the *Sharī‘ah* or deviate from Sunni doctrine.

Even though there is little that is controversial in Nund Rishi from the standpoint of Sunni orthodoxy, there is a strategic ambiguity in his open corpus in relation to the *Sharī‘ah* and the *Shī‘ī*. This is not entirely unexpected in a climate where even *Kubrawiyya* attitudes to the *ahl al-bayt* (Family of the Prophet) came to be seen as pro-*Shī‘ī*, but at the same time the Nurbakshiyya Order (the only Shi‘i Sufi Order) came to prominence in Kashmir in the century after Nund Rishi’s death. The Sufis had to assert a political distance from Shi‘ism in order to secure themselves against accusations of crypto-Shi‘ism. Yet there are also Nund Rishi *shruks* which invoke only members of Muhammad’s family such as his beloved daughter, Fatima:

*Pār pār laḡ zi tas pāghambaras*  
*Yihindis doras rahmat chae jāriy*  
*Kāl yali haq lagi roz-e maḥsharas*  
*Tas kun vomedvār āsan sārīy*  
*Samith ‘arzā karan jabāras*  
*Dostas pananis ghussu’ wani sārīy*  
*Wuch tu’ kū’tsu’ nyāmats ditsam samsāras*  
*Kānsi nu’ karām shukar guzārīy*  
*Ti bozi Fatima nishi khandu’kāras*  
*Dapi rabbanā bābas gham kās sārīy*  
*Toru’ adu’ bar vuchran rahmatu’kis garas*

*Yāras pananis sū't diyī sārīy*<sup>660</sup>

Each part of my body I wish I could sacrifice for that Prophet  
In his age, God's mercy still shelters us  
A time shall come of a Final Judgment  
That day everyone shall place his hopes in the Prophet  
And together will pray for forgiveness  
God shall that day complain to his friend  
That He put no limit on his blessings to the world  
Yet could not find anyone thanking  
This Fatima too shall hear from God  
And pray that God end all her father's worries  
It is then that the doors of the house of mercy shall open  
And God will accept everyone in Paradise along with his friend

This is a simple *shruk* steeped in traditional Muslim piety but the vision it reveals of end times is quite striking. It foregrounds the intercessory powers of Muhammad on the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-qiyāmah*). The love of Muhammad is fundamental to most Sufi movements but the *'ulamā* were cautious against excesses in expressions of Sufi love for Muhammad. In this *shruk*, Muhammad's intercession with God on the Day of Judgment is turned into nothing less than a final, dramatic encounter between the human species and its Creator. God complains to his friend about the heedlessness of human beings, who received freely but did not offer any thanks. It is not only Muhammad, but also his daughter Fatima, who is involved in these events and prays to God that He ease her father's worries about the fate of the human species. It is only then that God throws open the doors of the house of mercy, Paradise, for everyone.

In this *shruk*, the human species attains salvation because of the intercession of Prophet Muhammad in which his daughter Fatima also plays a significant role. The Islamic tradition highlights Prophet Muhammad's anxiety for the future of his new

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<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

community, and about the way they will fare on the Day of Judgment. The intercession (*tawassul*) is a controversial subject in traditional Muslim theology, but there is general agreement that Prophet Muhammad would have powers of intercession on the Day of Judgment when the anxiety of human beings, burdened with a difficult questioning, crosses all limits. Only Prophet Muhammad takes up this task of intercession (the tradition alludes to the Prophet saving up the power of his prayer for this day). In the *hadīth* tradition, the Prophet Muhammad is the first one to intercede for the doors of Paradise to be opened.

There are also other forms of intercession which come up in the *hadīth* tradition. Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, plays a role in the events of intercession in the Shi'i tradition and the *shruk* by Nund Rishi suggests porous borders between Shi'i and Sunni thinking in Kashmiri Sufism in the fifteenth century. In Islamic theology, it is not very clear if every human being is or is not going to eventually end up in Paradise (the sinners only after a time of punishment in Hell). But this *shruk* makes Prophet Muhammad's intercession a universal prayer for humanity and also assures human beings of glad tidings about the end: everyone shall enter Paradise. Such elements in the debate about the relations between Sufism and *Sharī'ah* never disappeared from South Asia, acquiring a centrality in Mughal India, and persisted even after the collapse of Muslim sovereignty over North India and the consolidation of British colonial rule. The persistence of such debates about Sufism and *Sharī'ah* reveal the political stakes involved in Sufi thinking in medieval Kashmir.

The historian Muzaffar Alam speaks of a deliberate Sufi intervention in medieval India “not merely in society and the social order, but equally in politics, as an attempt at defining political directions.”<sup>661</sup> These debates were already in continuity with similar debates among the Sufis of Baghdad in the ninth and tenth centuries which precipitated events that ended in the tragic martyrdom of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj remains a controversial figure in the history of Islam, but, quite paradoxically, his legacy in South Asia is affirmed not only by the Sufis but also by such modernist Islamic thinkers as Iqbal and even *Deobandis* such as Maulana Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī. In this Chapter, we shall examine how Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj became a key figure in Nund Rishi’s poetry allowing us deeper access to Nund Rishi’s thinking on the question of the *Sharī‘ah* and the relations between Sufism and politics.

Maṣṣūr figures as a symbol of an ‘ecstatic’ Sufism at odds with the *Sharī‘ah* in Sufi texts. But Nund Rishi is cautious in his approach to Sunni orthodoxy in the *shruks* and it appears as if the struggle between Junayd al-Baghdādī’s ‘sober’ Sufism and his student Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj’s ‘ecstatic’ Sufism takes on the form of a dialectic internal to Nund Rishi’s poetry itself. Nund Rishi is difficult to read precisely because of the extreme caution he exercises towards Sunni orthodoxy (as we have already seen in the *shruks* above that are among his few expressions on the history of early Islam), and it is also for this reason that he continues to appeal to not just the Sufis but also to reformist and revivalist Islamic movements in Kashmir. Even though Nund Rishi never really openly challenges the *Sharī‘ah*, he often ridicules the figure of the *mullāh* and their public displays of knowledge. We have briefly discussed this critique of the *mullāh* in

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<sup>661</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 83.

previous Chapters. Here we explore how this critique of the *mullāh* is difficult to separate from a critique of theological knowledge and imperial power. The attack on the figure of the *mullāh* is unusually strident in Nund Rishi:

*Mallav chalukh tu' mallav chakukh*  
*Mallav dyunthumae nu' alimuk nāv*  
*Mallav tatu' bonu' bar tal dolukh*  
*Mallo lazrāvrath mallu' nāv*<sup>662</sup>

The *mullāhs* washed you clean and the *mullāhs* abandoned you  
 The *mullāhs* did not see the word of true knowledge  
 The *mullāhs* waylaid you from the doors of heaven  
 O *Mullāh*, you have truly rocked the boat

In this *shruk*, Nund Rishi sarcastically addresses his reader as someone who has been robbed by a *mullāh* (literally, washed). The *mullāhs* abandon their victims after they are done with them. Nund Rishi reminds his reader that he was very close to entering the sacred space of divine presence on his own, but that the *mullāh* has waylaid him from the path. In a pun on the word *mallu'*, which could also be read in Kashmiri as 'the boatman', Nund Rishi in the last line of the *shruk* addresses the *mullāhs* directly in the vocative and bemoans the way they have endangered the boat. In the last line of the *shruk*, the boat cannot only be read as a metaphor for the self and its journey through time, but is also invoked as a metaphor for faith. As we see, Nund Rishi does not attack the *Sharī'ah* but rather its misuse by the *mullāh*. Nund Rishi then not only warns his reader about the dangers the *mullāh* poses to his spiritual journey but also warns the *mullāh* himself about the dangers he poses to Islam.

In another of his *shruks*, Nund Rishi again praises Maulana Rumī as a true *mullah*:

*Mallu' ās zi tu' Mollae Rūmī*

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<sup>662</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam*, 126.

*Natu' qar zi rumu' rumu' istighfār*  
*Sadras tār ditue tami*  
*Pāne sapun pānas yār*<sup>663</sup>

If you have to be a *mullāh*, then be a *mullāh* like Maulana Rumi  
Or else seek forgiveness from being a *mullāh*  
He is the one who crossed the ocean  
And he became his own true friend

This seems to be a variant of the *shruk* about Maulana Rumi quoted above. Here Maulana Rumi is here praised not only as someone who is a true *mullāh* but as the courageous one who crosses the seas of ignorance to recognize himself as his own true friend. There is a strong gnostic strain in this *shruk* that recalls Neoplatonic influence on Indo-Persianate Sufi thought. One must make a return journey through stages to one's true friend. In yet another of his *shruks*, Nund Rishi has this bitter advice for the *mullah*:

*'Ilm chu'e bod tu' mallu' chukh dānā*  
*Khabar yeti sana kiho*  
*Āru' ros dyūnthmakh tor-i ros chānā*  
*Varu'hol arikhāl ginā hiho*  
*Asi yeti racāv dayi sund panāh*  
*Mjēvu' ros dyūnthmakh vanā hiho*  
*Sahyeb pāne yeti ladi khānā*  
*Panu' khōtu' byākh zān dānā hiho*<sup>664</sup>

You have great knowledge and you are a big *mullāh*  
But what on earth are you doing here?  
I saw you as a carpenter without a saw and a chisel  
I saw you as the wood which cannot be cut  
We here received the refuge of the deity  
But I saw you as a store without any fruits  
The Friend will set up house here out of his own liking  
But you must first consider others better than you

Nund Rishi castigates the *mullāh* for his vanity and compares his state to someone who has scholastic knowledge but lacks any real skill. He then advises the *mullāh* to

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<sup>663</sup> Ibid., 128-29.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., 129.

respect the other more than his own self, and not to think of himself as someone who mediates the relations between the human and the divine. He explicitly reprimands the *mullāh* for claiming that he is doing God’s work. For Nund Rishi, the first task of the *mullāh* should have been to consider others as wiser than himself. In another of his *shruks*, he almost gives up on the *mullāhs* as shallow, irritable, and irredeemable:

*Mallu’ chivu’ tōh tu’ manzu’ kam dosu’*  
*Tshalas chivu’ zāgān akis akh*  
*‘Ilm chivu’ parān ma ‘āshiki hāvasu’*  
*Mahmān dīshith yivān tsakh*  
*Patu’ chivu’ gumanu’ aś chi khāsā*  
*Tati no mōkliv sāsū’ manzu’ akh*<sup>665</sup>

If you are preachers, then why these walls between you?  
 You are just waiting to jump at each other’s throat  
 You study the scripture only to earn a living  
 But if you see a guest, you become irritable  
 And then you consider your selves the chosen ones  
 Not even one in thousand will attain salvation over there

The competition among religious scholars is derided here as charlatanry and deception. Nund Rishi accuses the *mullāhs* of acquiring knowledge for the sake of securing their own livelihood. Such knowledge is condemned by Nund Rishi when it fails to create even any sense of hospitality for the stranger in the *mullāh*. In the name of the there and then of end times, the here and now of the *mullāh* is condemned. The critique of the figure of the *mullāh* also hinges here on the gap between a “false Muslim” and the “true Muslim.” But by turning the idea of the “true Muslim” into an ethics and practice of self-transformation, it was possible for Nund Rishi to claim equality between the Hindus and Muslim, lower castes and upper castes, natives and the immigrants.

The most obvious form the critique of the *mullāh* takes in Nund Rishi’s mystical

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 127.

poetry is indeed the *mullāh* as the local religious scholar or *madrassa* teacher. Let us, for instance, consider the following *shruk*:

*Mallu' āsi sonats waqtas halān*  
*Mallan tsīr n̄yerun phōlān āsi*  
*Mallu' chi sāl būzith balān*  
*Tavae mashidi kun tsalān āsi*<sup>666</sup>

The *mullāh* wakes up when it is late for the morning prayer  
The *mullāh* considers missing prayers auspicious  
The *mullāh* only feels better at an invitation to a feast  
The *mullāh* only runs to the mosque for such an invitation

Here we see Nund Rishi attack the *mullah* for his negligence of the prescribed religious duties of a Muslim. The *mullah* who is late for the pre-dawn prayers is always on time when there is a feast to be served at the mosque. Such biting satire is missing from much of medieval Kashmiri poetry and is characteristic of Nund Rishi's attack on the figure of the *mullah*. Rahman Rahi ends his seminal essay on Nund Rishi, which we have discussed in detail in the previous chapters, with the following words:

This brief survey of *Shaikh-ul- 'Ālam*'s poetry would remain incomplete if we also do not speak of the satire and humour of the Shaikh because it is this specialty which sets him apart from Lal Ded and other Sufi poets. The way Nund Rishi relentlessly satirizes the *makkār mullahs* and fake Rishis of his time almost mirrors the characters of Chaucer's *Prologue*.<sup>667</sup>

But despite his biting satire, Nund Rishi extends the critique of the *mullāh* into a more general critique of positive theological knowledge and dogmatics. The Sufis not only occupied the margins of an imperial Islam but also laid claim to the wilds beyond the frontiers of theological knowledge. This critique was not only made possible by the Qur'ānic message about the limits of human knowledge but also the image of Prophet

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<sup>666</sup> Asadullah Afaqi, *Ā'inā-e Ḥaq: Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al- 'Ālam* (Srinagar: Life Foundation, 2008), 320. This *shruk* is a part of a longer poem with similar *shruks*. This *shruk* is also given in the collection by B. N. Parimoo. See B. N. Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity*, 243.

<sup>667</sup> Rahman Rahi, "Shaikh al 'Ālam sanz shā'irānā ḥaṣiyath" in *Kahvat: Tanqīdī mazmūnan ḥanz sombran* (Srinagar: self-published, 1979), 167.

Muhammad himself as *al-nabī al-ummi*, the unlettered prophet.<sup>668</sup> Such a critique of knowledge acquires a deeper meaning in medieval Kashmir where the prestige of immigrant Persian Sufis largely rested upon their membership in extremely learned networks of Sufis across Central and South Asia. Shahzad Bashir reminds us that when the *Nurbakshiyā* Sufi, Shams al-Dīn Irāqī, left Kashmir in 1490-91, he wondered if the Kashmiris were at all capable of leading a Sufi practice.<sup>669</sup> The Rishis as a religious group were neither Muslim immigrants from Persia or Central Asia nor members of the local elite. Nund Rishi's attacks on the *mullāh* must also be situated in the intellectual history of Sufism itself, which developed with a view of the corruption at the heart of Muslim political centres, and the concomitant idea that a reversal could be effected from a periphery. Such corruption is opposed by the Sufi with a philosophy and politics of *'ishq* (love). The *shruks* reveal that even though the tensions between Sufism and theology are reconciled in the poetry of Nund Rishi, nonetheless some elements, such as the critique of theological knowledge and the privileging of love (*'ishq*), remain among the dominant themes. Some of Nund Rishi's *shruks* on themes such as *'ishq* also echo themes from classical Sufi poetry in Persian and Arabic.

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<sup>668</sup> The word *Ummi* carries meanings from the "mother" to the "unlettered." Some even argue that the *ummi* carries the meaning of a people without a scripture.

<sup>669</sup> Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nurbakshiya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 216. Bashir writes that even though Mir Shams al-Dīn Irāqī chose 'Ismā'īl Kubrāvī as the leader of the spiritual community he had established in Kashmir, he believed that "no one among the Kashmiris possessed the fortitude and self-control to become a full-fledged Sufi guide." Ibid. Even a Kashmiri historian like Muhammad Ishaq Khan wonders if the ordinary Kashmiri was capable of understanding Islam: "It is, in fact, open to question whether the more intellectual version of Islam, when propounded by a Sufi scholar like Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani, could have been understood by the common man." See Muhammad Ishaq Khan, "The Impact of Islam in the Sultanate Period (1320-1586)," in Richard Eaton, ed., *India's Islamic traditions 711-1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 347.

The Rishi Order emerged in a period of Kashmir's history when the *'ulamā* (religious scholars) and the Sufis were increasingly coming into opposition through much of the Islamic world, even though such an opposition was absent at the time of such early figures as Ḥasan al Baṣri (642-728), who was considered both a great *'ālim* and a great Sufi. The tensions emerged around the ninth and tenth centuries and were brought under control by the time of Imam al-Ghazālī (1058-1111). The uneasy truce between the *'ulamā* and the Sufis that prevailed in most of South Asia for about nine hundred years owes much to the intervention of al-Ghazālī. There was now no open opposition between Sufism and *Sharī'ah*, but the Sufi critique of knowledge and the unease towards Sufism among the *'ulamā* persisted. Rarely did the Sufi challenge to the political control of the *'ulamā* break into open rebellion. The move from both sides was to affirm the true Sufi or the true *'ālim* and to attack the pretenders. But the Sufis always warned against a one-sided approach to Islam that would neglect ethics, and *Sharī'ah* appeared in their understanding only as a condition of possibility of spiritual transformation, but not as an end in itself. For the *'ulamā*, an increasing focus on inner states, will and motivation made it impossible to legislate in a meaningful way: for them, the *Sharī'ah* was both the means and the end.

Both these stances played out against a climate of fierce struggles for political power, and the situation was different in every region. The trope of an inauthentic *mullāh*, however, emerges early in Islamic mystical poetry from its beginnings and persists even in such twentieth century Urdu poets as Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). One way the severe indictment of the *mullāh* can be read is by treating the figure to be a

local *madrassa* (religious school) teacher who is ignorant of and indifferent to the demands of Islamic spirituality. But it is clear that Nund Rishi extends this critique of the *mullāh* from the sociological to the epistemological and ethical. This is the case also for such modernist Islamic poets as Muhammad Iqbal. The *mullāhs* Nund Rishi severely castigates in his *shruks* are the ones who lay claim to superior knowledge.

A similar attitude is exemplified in the Sufi tradition by al-Ghazālī, who in his famous *Letter to a Disciple*, writes: “This conceited fool does not know that when he acquires knowledge, if he does not act on the strength of it, the evidence against him will become decisive, as the Messenger of God ...said, ‘The man most severely punished on the Day of Resurrection is a scholar whom God did not benefit by his knowledge.’”<sup>670</sup> But even for al-Ghazālī, the challenge was to reconcile scholastic knowledge with Sufism. Nund Rishi echoes this attitude of the Sufis when he speaks of the state of the scholar as a beast of burden: ‘*Alimuk bor loduhok kharan* (this knowledge is a burden to them like a huge weight loaded on an ass). Nund Rishi does celebrate ‘*ilm* (knowledge) in his *shruks*, but he makes a distinction between the ‘*ilm* of God/gnosis and the ‘*ilm* of the theologian.

Why the discomfort with the ‘*ilm* of the theologian? In one of his *shruks*, Nund Rishi compares the knowledge which leads one to pretend that one is better than the others as nothing less than the way of the ‘*Iblīs* (the Devil, or Satan, who rebels against the command of God in the Qur’ānic creation story):

*Yimai parith lāgan kalān*  
*Timan Iblīs ralān āsi*  
*Tobu’ chuiy davā tavai chu’ balān*

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<sup>670</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Letter to a disciple*, tr. by Tobias Mayer (Cambridge : The Islamic Texts Society, 2005), 6.

*Tobu' ros vath dalān āsi*<sup>671</sup>

Those who study to pretend to be Elders  
They step into the shadow of *Iblīs*, the Satan  
Repentance is the only way to cure and return  
No repentance and you lose your way

In the Islamic tradition, '*Iblīs* is the angel (or a *djinn*) who refused to bow before Adam when God created Adam and whispers (*yūwaswisu*) temptations into the hearts of men. The reason for his own downfall is that he considered himself as superior to Adam. '*Iblīs* epitomizes pride and disobedience in the Islamic tradition.<sup>672</sup> But this pride and disobedience has its origins in his claim to superiority in knowledge. Nund Rishi considers those '*ulamā* who develop a sense of pride because of their knowledge as associates of '*Iblīs*. There is nothing short of a complete reevaluation, a revolution, in the way Nund Rishi makes the figure of the ignorant, the lover, and the minor central to his sustained critique of knowledge. Unlike these impostors, for Nund Rishi, there are true seekers of knowledge who will shine on the Day of Judgment:

*Haq lagī ākhar cāk gatshiy palan*  
*Āliman ruh prazlān āsiy*  
*Sād āsi tsalān tsūr āsi laran*  
*Teli kīlak akreyi pholān āsi*<sup>673</sup>

There will be a Day of Reckoning, the rocks shall be sundered  
The souls of the thinkers will be glowing  
The pretenders will run and the thieves escape  
The dancing boy shall rejoice in inaction

The true seekers of knowledge for Nund Rishi are the Sufis and saints he invokes in

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<sup>671</sup> B. N. Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1984), 240-41. This and the following *shruk* are not included either by Amin Kamil or Moti Lal Saqi. Parimoo also had access to manuscripts in private collections. I have modified the transliteration for these two *shruks* for consistency.

<sup>672</sup> In Sufi poetry, *Iblīs* is also sometimes seen as a true lover because of his refusal to bow before Adam because *Iblīs* is seen to have a deep, and jealous, love of God.

<sup>673</sup> B. N. Parimoo, *Unity in Diversity* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1984), 241

countless *shruks*. Nund Rishi takes poetic licence in this *shruk*, which invokes conventional metaphors of apocalyptic reversals at end times to declare that only the thinkers shall be at peace on the Day of Judgment. According to Islamic theology, the Day of Judgment is a horrific end that does not spare anyone (not even the Prophets). But the term he uses for pretender, as opposed to the thinker, is “*sād*,” which is also used in medieval Kashmiri for the immigrant Muslims (“*sād makkār*”, for instance, in contemporary Kashmiri, carries the meaning of hypocrite even though it was originally used for immigrants pretending to be religious leaders). The new immigrant Muslims in Kashmir could establish a claim to their share in political power and a role in the new Sultanate by claiming to be better Muslims than local Kashmiris in matters of adherence to the *Sharī‘ah*.

The relations between Sufism and theology were complex in South Asia, but the emphasis on religious law in Kashmir was strong from the beginning in the insistence of the *Kubrāwiyyā* missionary Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī and his son, Muḥammad ‘Alī Hamadānī, who pushed for a strong *Sharī‘ah*-based State during their missions to Kashmir. The *Kubrāwiyyā* could not persuade the Kashmiri Sultans to implement a strict rule of the *Sharī‘ah* and Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī had to leave Kashmir only after a brief stay of around three to four years.<sup>674</sup> The conflicts between the Sultans and the Sufi shaikhs in the medieval period were by no means confined to the Kashmir Sultanate.

Such conflicts were to recur in the Sultanates of the Deccan and Gujarat. But the reasons which contributed to Chishti success in India worked against the Rishis in Kashmir. The rise of the Chishtis happened in a city which was also the capital of the

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<sup>674</sup> See Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir: Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century*, 49.

Delhi Sultanate when it controlled a vast empire but the rise of the Rishis appears to have been halted in Srinagar where the *Kubrāwiyyā* (and then *Suharwardiyyā* and *Naqshbandiyyā*) Persian Sufi Orders gained ground and the Rishi Order dwindled in influence. The Persian Sufi Orders could also rely on a transnational network as opposed to the Rishis whose influence remained largely confined to rural Kashmir. The situation was no different than it had been in the twelfth century in the Delhi Sultanate. Let us turn to a description of the political situation of the new immigrants to the Delhi Sultanate by the historian Muzaffar Alam:

While on the one hand they were surrounded by a hostile population in India, on the other the Mongols had torn apart the fabric of Muslim power in Central Asia. Many members of ruined ruling dynasties—noblemen, saints and scholars—now looked to north India as the place where they might settle in peace. Rulers in such newly gained lands could not, thus, afford policies or actions which might reinforce opposition to their conquest.<sup>675</sup>

The situation was similar in fourteenth-century Kashmir where elite immigrants from Central Asia were accommodated after the Mongol plunder of the lands. The immigrant members of the ruling class in both the Delhi and the Kashmir Sultanates insisted on the *Shari‘ah* to secure their privilege in the new political dispensation. Yet the rulers of both the Delhi and the Kashmir Sultanate (notwithstanding certain exceptions, such as the reign of Sultan Sikandar in Kashmir) largely refused to pursue policies which might alienate their Hindu populations. Like the Muslim rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, the rulers of the Muslim *Shahmīrī* dynasty in Kashmir nonetheless “looked for legitimacy from the Sufis, who had by then amply demonstrated that truth – the Islamic truth – was not confined to the pages of a book on *shari‘a*.”<sup>676</sup> The stage was set for an atmosphere of competitive spirituality, not only between the Persian and the Kashmiri Sufis, but also

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<sup>675</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India*, 87.

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

between the Muslims and the Hindus. It is in this atmosphere of competitive spirituality (in particular between the immigrant Sufis and the local Rishis) that Nund Rishi affirmed a “learned ignorance” against theological knowledge.<sup>677</sup> But we already encounter this idea in the transformations of medieval Sufism in figures such as Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Ibn al-‘Arabī and Maulana Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī which privilege love over law.

The tensions between Sufism and theology go back to the emergence of Sufism in the early centuries of Islam as a tendency opposed to the growth of Islamic imperial power from Damascus under the Ummayyad dynasty. In its early years, Sufism was nothing but this turn to an ascetic Islam in the central Muslim lands. But, as Ayman Shihadeh suggests, by the fifth century of Islam (eleventh-century of the Christian Era), Sufism had consolidated from an ascetical-mystical milieu of early Islam to “a systematic and well-structured path to knowing God (*ma‘rifa*) through a process of internal transformation, which attempts to transcend the ordinary human condition, usually by means of ethico-spiritual discipline.”<sup>678</sup>

It is unclear to what degree external stimuli such as encounters with Christianity, Buddhism or Hinduism at the borders of Islam precipitated this internal transformation.<sup>679</sup> Most contemporary scholars of Sufism are in agreement that the transformation depended upon elements internal to Islamic intellectual and spiritual history and the technical language of Islamic mysticism emerges from the Qur’ān. But from the eighth to the

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<sup>677</sup> I have borrowed the term “learned ignorance” from the Christian cardinal Nicholas de Cusa. See Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, tr. H. Lawrence Bond (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 19-22.

<sup>678</sup> Ayman Shihadeh, “Introduction” in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>679</sup> The early scholarship on Sufism often traced the rise of Sufism to either the influence of Christianity, Buddhism, or Hinduism. But most contemporary scholarship on Islam considers Sufism as a movement internal to the growth of the Islamic tradition.

eleventh century, Islam also developed theological and legalistic forms of inquiry which attempted “to know God, through an exposition which reasons from evidence, whether rational or scriptural.”<sup>680</sup> The Sufis did not possess a systematic theology nor did they develop jurisprudence (even though Sufis were often also trained in both theology and jurisprudence). The situation was peculiar before al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) attempted his synthesis of theology and Sufism. Shihadeh writes:

Even by the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> centuries, Sufis, *qua* Sufis, had relatively little of their own to offer by way of formal or systematic theology or theosophy. The learned, formal and reasoned exposition of the nature and acts of God continued to be the mainstay of the theologians. Jurists dealt with practice; theologians took care of creed. And in theology, as in jurisprudence, dialectical fault-lines were defined purely in relation to the epistemological dichotomy of scripture and reason, mystical intuition (*ilhām*) or vision (*kashf*) almost never making an appearance.<sup>681</sup>

There were also tensions between the rational and scriptural approaches to theology but it was the tension between Sufism and theology that evolved into a crisis. The Sufis had denounced excessive concern with formal or systematic theology. They were not in search of a new epistemology and stressed reflection on the relations between knowledge and action. Nund Rishi himself often invokes the idea of ‘*amal* (action), or practices of the self, and connects ontology to an ethics by stressing the accountability of all human action. In Arabic, the same root gives us both ‘*ilm* (knowledge) and ‘*amal* (action). The tension between Sufism and theology appears to have been less about doctrinal or legalistic issues and more about politics. The relationship between Sufism and theology had never, in any case, been mutually exclusive: the examples of Harith al-Muḥasibī, al-Qushayrī and ‘Abdullāh al-Anṣārī should suffice. The early Sufis engaged with theology: al-Qushayrī, for instance, attempted to reconcile Sufism with scholastic theology (*kalām*).

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<sup>680</sup> Ayman Shihadeh, “Introduction” in *Sufism and Theology*, 1.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

‘Abdullah al-Anṣārī, a Ḥanbalī traditionalist and a Sufī, also made an effort to reconcile the traditionalist Ḥanbalī legalistic position with Sufism.<sup>682</sup> The situation, in other words, was far from simple. Such traditionalists like Ibn Taymiyya, considered an opponent of Sufism, sometimes turned to the Sufis to oppose scholastic theology (*kalām*).<sup>683</sup>

Shihadeh writes:

As Sufism consolidated its position as a distinct and increasingly learned and intellectual tradition, and given both the shared noetic concerns of both the Sufi and theological traditions, and the significant overlap in their constituencies, it was inevitable that tension and interaction between the two currents would increase. Political circumstances were, furthermore, often contributing factors, subtly or overtly intertwined with religious and intellectual concerns.<sup>684</sup>

These political circumstances were often about attitudes to imperial power and the fate of those at the margins in new Muslim societies (the Zanj slave labour, for instance, in the case of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj; or, the peasantry in the case of Nund Rishi). Even as ‘Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadāni (1098-1131) and Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (1155-1191) developed a theosophical form of Sufism, and paid for it with their lives (such were the risks involved in straying too far from mainstream Islamic teachings); al-Ghazālī and Maybudī synthesized Ash‘arite theology with Sufism.<sup>685</sup> The attempts to reconcile Sufism and theology could be seen to culminate in the voluminous writings of Abu Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī, which brought together Ash‘ari theology with Sufi teaching. But before this moment of synthesis, the tensions had already exploded about a century prior to al-Ghazālī’s efforts in the torture and hanging of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj. Even though post-Ghazālī synthesis of theology and Sufism left a strong impact on Sufism in South Asia,

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<sup>682</sup> *Ḥanbalī* school is one of the four schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam. Ayman Shihadeh, “Introduction” in *Sufism and Theology*, 3.

<sup>683</sup> Ayman Shihadeh, “Introduction” in *Sufism and Theology*, 4-5.

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>685</sup> Ash‘arite theology was an early school of Islamic theology founded by Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Ash‘ari (874-936). *Ibid.*, 3.

the love for Maṣṣūr flowed unrestrained in vernacular poetry. A Sunni orthodoxy and Sufi heresy found a middle ground upon which the task of interpretation revolved around narrowing the gap between the *Sharī'ah* and Sufism.

Nund Rishi himself takes a cautious but clearly unambiguous stand on the controversies between the practices of those Baghdādī Sufis who came to be associated either with an “ecstatic” or “sober” Sufism. He clearly situates the Rishis in relation not only to the legendary ascetics of Kashmiri cultural memory such as Palās Rishi and Mīrān Rishi but also with the legacy of the “ecstatic Sufis” such as Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj. As stated above, Nund Rishi explicitly invokes three figures in the history of Sufism in his mystical poetry: Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and ‘Uways al-Qarnī. These figures challenge the limits of Sufi theology and allow us to situate Nund Rishi in relation to the controversies around Sufism in medieval Kashmir. We will, in particular, examine the relation between the thinking of Nund Rishi and Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj.

The stakes in a critical understanding of the debates between Sufism and theology, and how Sufis such as Nund Rishi navigates these debates, become clear from the introduction to an edited collection of writings on the history of anti-Sufi polemics, *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, where the editors Frederik de Jong and Bernd Radtke, while underscoring the need to research oppositions to Islamic mysticism, emphasize that such a project is indispensable to an understanding of “present-day fundamentalist Islam and the manner in which anti-Sufi fundamentalist orientations translate themselves into concrete action...”<sup>686</sup> The anti-Sufi

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<sup>686</sup> F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke, “Introduction,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden : Brill, 1999). 1-2.

polemic is almost a universal marker of fundamentalist Islam. But the examples which Frederik de Jong and Bernd Radtke cite of anti-Sufi orientations of fundamentalist movements are the destruction of tombs of saints in Yemen during the civil war in 1984 and the killing of Mirwaiz Qazi Nisar in South Kashmir in June 1994. The authors give the following reason for the killing of this Kashmiri preacher:

The generosity he displayed towards Hindus, in line with the Kashmiri Sufi tradition of liberality and acceptance of other faiths, is said to be the principal reason for his being killed by members of the separatist movement of fundamentalist orientation, the Hizb al-mujahidin.<sup>687</sup>

I am here not interested in analyzing this reading of a more recent moment in the history of controversies around Sufism in Kashmir as an instance of the deployment of *Kashmīriyat*, a popular ideology of Kashmiri syncretism, instrumental to both Kashmiri nationalism and the Indian State. Nor am I interested in providing a thicker account of the history of Kashmiri insurgency in the early 1990s and its complex dynamics to situate the assassination of Mirwaiz Qazi Nisar (a recent book written by two British investigative journalists, for instance, alleges that Mirwaiz Qazi Nisar was assassinated by a militant who had been turned by the Indian counterinsurgency).<sup>688</sup> I cite this example to signal the difficulty of understanding Nund Rishi outside the mediations of the debate on Sufism and *Sharī'ah* (the debate is often referred to in Urdu as the *Sharī'at-Tarīqat* debate or in English language literature on the subject as the *Sufism- Sharī'ah* debate).

Opposition to Sufism goes back to the formative years of Islam where there were discussions on the nature of *zuhd* (ascetic piety) in relation to the practice of Prophet

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

<sup>688</sup> See Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark, *The Meadow: Kashmir 1995—Where the Terror Began* (London: Harper Collins, 2012), 358-59.

Muhammad.<sup>689</sup> Sufism can be traced back to early ascetics in Islam who were “retreating from the world in penitence following the events at Karbala, and in response to Umayyad policies.”<sup>690</sup> The events at Karbala, the martyrdom of the pious grandson of Prophet Muhammad and his family, at the orders of the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd, were the culmination of contestations about the ethics and politics of Umayyad dynastic rule by the ‘Alīds (‘Alī, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, and his supporters). A key early Sufi figure is Ḥasan al-Baṣri who imitated ‘Alī in his practice of *zuhd* (ascetic piety), and ‘Uways al-Qarni, who fought on the side of ‘Alī against the Umayyads.<sup>691</sup> According to the traditionalist Ibn Taymiyya, the earliest Sufi hospices were built by the students of Ḥasan al-Baṣri’s disciple, ‘Abd al-Wahīd bin Zayd.<sup>692</sup> Even though there was a remarkable continuity in developing Sufi ideas in the early centuries of Islam, there were two tendencies that emerged by the tenth century. Frederik de Jong and Bernd Radtke write:

The claims by the early Sufis to reciprocal love between God and themselves as divinely-chosen people were held in conjunction with the notion of *tawba* [return]... Within Sufi circles the notion distinguished the proponents of a gnostic and mystically inspired spirituality from those characterized by a deeply ascetic and traditional religiosity. The moment of *tawba* was conceived as the moment of radical re-orientation to God and the beginning of a direct access to him.<sup>693</sup>

Much of the controversy between Sufism and theology revolved around the idea of *‘ishq* (love) between God and the mystic. A relationship between God and man was no longer predicated on God’s inaccessibility. The notion of *tawba* or (spiritual) return, in contrast,

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<sup>689</sup> F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke, “Introduction,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, 2.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid., 3.

is central to Islamic eschatology. But some mystics who adhered to this notion of *tawba* also “held that their spiritual level was equal to the spiritual level of the prophets.”<sup>694</sup> Both of these positions (*‘ishq*, love, and *tawba*, return) created problems for the Sufis with the theologians and ordinary believers, who were inclined towards an understanding of the relationship between man and God as asymmetrical.

As early as the ninth century, the concept of *‘ishq* came to be severely contested by the opponents of Sufism.<sup>695</sup> Frederik de Jong and Bernd Radtke add: “The earliest legal persecution of Sufis, in the second half of the third/ninth century in Baghdad, initiated by Ghulam Khalīl against Abū’l Ḥasan al-Nurī and his circle, may be the outcome of differences over the concept of *‘ishq*.”<sup>696</sup> Other controversial ideas such as Sahl al-Tustari’s *nūr-e Muḥammad* (Light of Muhammad), the originary light of Muhammad, were also instrumental in fueling the controversies around Sufism. The trial and execution of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj complicated matters.<sup>697</sup> Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj was not the only Sufi to be executed. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadāni (1098-1131) and Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī suffered the same fate. Josef van Ess argues that disapprovals of Sufism would often only turn into an outright opposition in the case of a power struggle.<sup>698</sup> As soon as Sufism had come under attack for its antinomian tendencies, there emerged in Baghdad a more sober tendency that could be traced back to Junayd al-

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<sup>694</sup> Ibid.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>697</sup> Josef van Ess, “Sufism and its opponents: Reflections on topoi, tribulations and transformations,” in *Islamic mysticism contested: thirteen centuries of controversies and polemics*, eds.F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden : Brill, 1999), 30.

<sup>698</sup> Josef van Ess, “Sufism and its opponents: Reflections on topoi, tribulations and transformations,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds.F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden : Brill, 1999), 26.

Baghdādī, a contemporary and teacher of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, who opposed the excesses of an ecstatic Sufism. Both Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj and the Sufi concept of *‘ishq* figure in the mystical poetry of Nund Rishi in a way which unmistakably places Nund Rishi in a relation with both the sober approach of Junayd al-Baghdādī and the ecstatic Sufism of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj.

What was the situation in South Asia in relation to these debates and polemics? The situation between Sufis and non-Sufis was neither so polarized nor binary.<sup>699</sup> The controversy around the use of music and ecstatic utterances persisted, however, from the early centuries of Muslim rule in South Asia. Even though there was legal sanction to the practice of *samā‘* under the Delhi Sultanate, al-Ghazālī too had made the use of music permissible under special circumstances.<sup>700</sup> The conditions in Kashmir were a little different because it was the Sufis who were responsible for large-scale conversions to Islam in Kashmir after the advent of a Muslim Sultanate. The tenor of rival contestations there had more to do with the *Kubrāwiyyā* insistence on the norms of the *Sharī‘ah* (the Shafī‘i Law, which the *Kubrāwiyyā* followed, called for a more orthodox approach in relation to non-Muslims). The reasons why the Sufism-*Sharī‘ah* debate acquired centrality in medieval Kashmir are the following: the powerful *Kubrāwiyyā* Sufi Order in Kashmir repeatedly appealed to the new *Shahmīrī* Sultans to bring their governance closer to the norms of the *Sharī‘ah*, which in turn put pressure on the relations between the ruling class and its largely non-Muslim population; the practices of local Rishis which

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<sup>699</sup> F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke, “Introduction,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, 11.

<sup>700</sup> See Abu Hāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Al-Ghazzali on Listening to Music*, translated by Muhammad Nur Abdus Salam (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2003).

owed much to the Hindu-Buddhist ascetic traditions of Kashmir were seen as a challenge to the *Sharī'ah*; and, the *Shari'ah* was fundamental to such matters as the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the permissibility of women joining the Sufi Orders (Nund Rishi accepted many women into the Rishi Order such as Sham Bibi and Dehat Bibi), and the use of music in Sufi gatherings. Yet the Rishi line of attack was rarely against the *Sharī'ah* as such, but only against its use towards worldly ends. The question then often turned around the idea of an authentic *faqīh* (jurist), an authentic *'alim* (scholar) and an authentic Sufi. The idea that the founders of the four Sunni schools of law had already finished the interpretive tasks for the community atleast for legal purposes (often referred to as “the closing of the gates of *ijtihād*”, or independent legal reasoning) did not help matters.

The Rishi Order appeared at a time of theoretical consolidation of Sufism but also the weakening of Muslim power in Islamic central lands. The Persian Sufi Orders were keenly aware of the political failures of the Caliphate and sought an Islamic renewal that involved strict spiritual regimens and stressed the teacher-student relationship. The students were trained in modes of obedience that resembled modes of servitude considered best only in one's relationship to God. There was nothing unusual about a strong relationship between teachers and students in Islam but it was the esoteric turn in understanding this relationship with parallels to the man-God relationship that worried the *'ulamā*. Even though the Rishi Order was unique for its adherence to vegetarianism, celibacy, and ascetic practices unfamiliar to the Persian Orders, the Rishis also relied on a mode of training that depended upon a strong teacher-student relationship. The later

biographical tradition refers to Nund Rishi's closest disciples as *khalifās*, or caliphs. But the more fundamental difference between the Persian Orders and the Rishis were in their attitudes to political power. The Rishis in the Kashmir Sultanate and the Chishtis in the Delhi Sultanate on the whole stayed away from political power, but the *Kubrāwiyyā* in Kashmir and the *Suharwardiyyā* in Multan and Delhi endeavored to influence imperial policy. The attitude of the Rishis (and Chishtis in the Delhi Sultanate) is akin to those of the early Islamic mystics, or *zuhhād*, who retreated from worldly power and did not challenge their political opponents. As Gerhard Böwering observes:

The Muslim mystics of classical Sufism — from the beginnings of Islamic asceticism to the time of al-Ghazzali — did not challenge their opponents with an agenda of the just society, a blueprint of political reform or a call for an Islamic State. Instead, they saw this world, Allah's creation, as a transitory home, a theater of trial and tribulation, a situation to overcome rather than to organize and enjoy. Fully aware of the injustices of this world, they were intent on reaching God, the sole source and goal of justice and the only ruler and lord of the world to come. They identified the root and cause of injustice as within man and devised ways to conquer evil by spiritual renewal, termed *tawba*, 'repentance and inner conversion.'<sup>701</sup>

But it is this tendency of medieval Sufism that was overturned by the *Naqshbandīs* in Central Asia and the *Suhrawardīs* in South Asia. The Rishis and the Chishtis retained a distrust of worldly power but also developed a vision for a just society. This is where the Rishis and the Chishtis departed from the *zuhhād*, the early Islamic mystics. If the early Islamic mystics did not actively challenge their opponents, it was in equal measure due to the lack of political space available to them. But the concern for questions of social and economic justice was rarely abandoned. The Rishis persisted in their concern about the fate of the poor, lower castes, and women. But there is a tension in the history of Sufism between a traditional, ascetic religiosity and a mystical, Gnostic spirituality, a tension we

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<sup>701</sup> Gerhard Böwering, "Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy," in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45.

also find at work in Nund Rishi's poetry.<sup>702</sup> If there are *shruks* about a Gnostic transformation of the self, or *'ishq*, in Nund Rishi, there are also *shruks* in Nund Rishi about *tawba*. The Rishis made a very different attempt at intervention in Kashmiri politics than the *Kubrāwiyyā* Sufis. If, following Talal Asad, we concur with Bruce Lawrence that "orthodoxy is always the product of a network of power," then we can claim that the Rishis challenged the rise of an Islamic orthodoxy in medieval Kashmir by refusing to collude with either the Sultanate or the *Kubrāwiyyā*.<sup>703</sup> We must therefore understand the Rishi challenge in medieval Kashmir in relation to the networks of political power in the new Sultanate, which included the politically ascendant new immigrants, the *'ulamā*, and the ruling classes.

The three figures from the canonical history of Sufism that Nund Rishi explicitly invokes are Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, 'Uways al-Qarnī, and Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj. 'Uways al-Qarnī, as we shall see below, is invoked to secure the legitimacy of a Sufi Order with no chains of transmission going back to either the other Sufi masters or to 'Ali Abī Ṭālib or 'Abū Bakr. A chain of transmission that goes back to a recognized Sufi saint or to 'Ali Abī Ṭālib or 'Abū Bakr is the *sine qua non* for Sufi teaching. But it is with the figure of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj that Nund Rishi engages more than any other figure in Sufi history. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj is also seen as the first martyr of Sufism who was brutally tortured and hanged for his open challenge to Islamic theology. Nund Rishi situates himself at a distance from Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj so as to not stir up a controversy in relation to his own

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<sup>702</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>703</sup> Bruce Lawrence, "Veiled Opposition to Sufis in Muslim South Asia: Dynastic Manipulation of Mystical Brotherhoods by the Great Mughal" in *Islamic Mysticism Contested : Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, eds. F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 436.

understanding of Ḥallāj's martyrdom. Yet the fact that Nund Rishi aligns himself with Ḥallājian rebellion against orthodox Islamic theology is extremely significant.

For generations of Sufis, in particular in South Asia, speaking about Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj is a way of speaking about the meanings of Sufism and its relation to the *Sharī'ah*. Nund Rishi is unambiguous in his stand of unequivocal affirmation of the *Sharī'ah*, but at the same time he does not hesitate to affiliate himself with the legacy of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj. This is a strategy which was as effectively pursued by the Chishti and Qadiri Sufis of Mughal India. Muzaffar Alam discusses the case of 'Abd al-Razzaq Bansawi, a Qadiri Sufi of Awadh, who was not only the teacher of Mullah Niẓām al-Dīn Sihālī, the compiler of the *dars-i nizami* curriculum still in use in Muslim *madrāsas* in South Asia today, but also encouraged accommodation of Hindu ideas and practices.<sup>704</sup> Even though Bansawi participated in many Hindu practices that may have been considered dubious from the standpoint of the *Sharī'ah*, he took care to be cautious in any public avowal of these heterodox ideas and practices.<sup>705</sup> It is clear from the tone and tenor of the *shruks* which celebrate Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj and attack the *mullāhs* that Nund Rishi had a more expansive idea of the *Sharī'ah* which retained space for Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj's controversial ecstatic sayings. Even though few of Nund Rishi's own ecstatic utterances are inadmissible from the standpoint of the *Sharī'ah*, he is by no means the only Kashmiri mystic who turns to such *shathiyat* (ecstatic sayings). The sixteenth century Kashmiri Suhrawardī Sufi Shaikh Ḥamza Makhdūm was also known for his ecstatic utterances.<sup>706</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 98-112.

<sup>705</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>706</sup> Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, *Sufism and Rishism in Kashmir: The Lesser Known Aspects of some Sufi Orders* (Srinagar: City Book Centre, 2011), 122.

It is by exploring Nund Rishi's thinking on Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj that we get a better sense of his position on the *Sharī'ah* -Sufism debate. But there could be another reason why Nund Rishi turns to Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj in a familiar and intimate tone: Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj had visited Kashmir around 896 AD, and it is plausible that the cultural memory of that visit had endured in Kashmiri Sufi networks.<sup>707</sup> Nund Rishi addresses Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj affectionately as *Kāk*, which is a term used for an elder of the community but also can mean "Uncle" or even "Father" or "Brother." In its challenge of Islamic orthodoxy, Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj's martyrdom is seen as a moment of great renewal even by some modernist Muslim thinkers such as Iqbal, who are otherwise critical of the excesses of Sufism. The martyrdom of al-Ḥallāj was seen by other Sufis as an event in spiritual Islam and was to resonate in the Muslim world because of its striking resemblance to the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, who challenged the authority of the corrupt Yazīd who had usurped the Caliphate. The tragedy at Karbala, where the family of Ḥusayn was brutally massacred by Yazīd's army and the martyrdom of one of the greatest Sufis in the Islamic tradition are two of the most traumatic events in Islamic history. We have already noted that Nund Rishi steers clear of any controversy in relation to the resulting Sunni-Shi'i split, but it is not easy for him to do so with Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj. Nund Rishi invokes Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj more than any other Sufi in his entire oeuvre. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj is often seen in Sufi scholarship as representing an ecstatic tendency within Sufism in opposition to some of his own teachers such as Junayd al-Baghdādī who are supposed to have advocated a more sober Sufism. We must remember

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<sup>707</sup> Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and martyr of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 178.

that the debate about al-Ḥallāj is not an ordinary one: nothing less than the meaning of Islam is at stake. No less a figure than the theologian Ibn Taymiyya (often invoked by the most radical Muslim theologians even in our own times) writes in opposition to al-Ḥallāj.<sup>708</sup> But it is Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj, and Ibn al-‘Arabī, and their philosophy of love and unity that dominated South Asian Sufism until the nineteenth century rather than the theology of figures like Ibn Taymiyya. Nowhere in South Asia is the influence of a figure like al-Ḥallāj as strong as it is in Kashmir and Sindh.

The reason Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj is so fundamental to Nund Rishi is because, as Louis Massignon points out, Kashmir is “the only, sure point on Ḥallāj’s itinerary” in India.<sup>709</sup> Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi adds: “...it seems likely that Ḥallāj was quite well-known in Kashmir as he had visited Kashmir in A.D. 895.”<sup>710</sup> Ḥallāj is one of the most revered figures of Sufism to have traveled to Kashmir. Let us briefly turn to the life of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj before taking up Nund Rishi’s *shruks* on his martyrdom (Nund Rishi addresses al-Ḥallāj more than any other figure in Islamic history except for Prophet Muhammad). Despite his having a huge following (which included the *Ahl-e Hadīth*), Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj was put to a gruesome death in Baghdad by the authorities of the Caliphate. Born into an Arabicized Fars in 858, Maṣṣūr took up his father’s profession who was a wool carder. His first name was also, quite surprisingly, Ḥusayn.<sup>711</sup> His grandfather was a Zoroastrian convert to Islam just as Nund Rishi’s grandfather was a convert from Hinduism. Ḥusayn

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<sup>708</sup> For a more nuanced discussion of the subject, see Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Commentary on the Creed of al-Ḥallāj,” in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 123-136.

<sup>709</sup> Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 178.

<sup>710</sup> Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, *Sufism and Rishism in Kashmir: The Lesser Known Aspects of some Sufi Orders* (Srinagar: City Book Centre, 2011), 121.

<sup>711</sup> Herbert Mason, *Al-Hallaj* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), 1.

learned the Qur'ān from the great mystic, Sahl bin 'Abdullah al-Tūstārī, who followed the esoteric and interiorizing Islam of Ḥasan al-Baṣri.<sup>712</sup> His early training was as a strict Sunni Ḥanbalite traditionalist at the time of the rule of Caliph Ma'mūn under whose reign there was a revival of Hellenistic thought and the rationalist Mu'tazila were promoted against the traditionalists.

From Tūstar, he moved to Basra, where al-Ḥallāj came into touch with the circle of Junayd al-Baghdādī. It is in Basra that Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj developed a deep awareness of social injustices. Both al-Ḥallāj and Nund Rishi were subject to persecution by a venal establishment at the Court for their unorthodox political ideas. It is quite compelling that Nund Rishi's situation in Kashmir was hardly different, even though there appears to have been more political space for dissenting ideas in the early Sultanate period in Kashmir than in al-Ḥallāj's Baghdad. That political space had much to do with the Kashmiri Sultanate's still having a large non-Muslim majority. Herbert W. Mason writes:

Basra had become in the third Islamic century a center also of social crisis, prompted by the revolt of black slaves, the Zanj, imported from the Sudan and East Africa to dig in the salt mines of lower Iraq. As a result of gross mistreatment by the 'Abbasid Sunnite masters ruling from Baghdad and aroused by opposition from Shi'ite propagandists using the issue to undermine the authority of the dynasty's central government, the banner was raised as an outcry for justice in a religious community that professed equality among all members.<sup>713</sup>

It was only after the failure of the Zanj revolt and a long pilgrimage to Mecca that al-Ḥallāj became increasingly dissatisfied with the political quietism of the Sufis of his time. He had protested against the Caliphate authorities for Zanj salt field labourers and also supported the starving Bedouins who stormed Basra and Baghdad in search for food.<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>712</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid., 79.

He also contested the control of Baghdad elites over public resources and funds.<sup>715</sup>

Annemarie Schimmel writes about the larger political circumstances against which the al-Hallāj controversy unravelled:

Aside from the problem of mystical love, political and social problems were at stake. Hallaj was a friend of the chamberlain Naṣr al-Qushūrī, who favored better administration and juster taxation, dangerous ideas in a time when the caliph was almost powerless and the viziers, though all-powerful for a short period, changed frequently. The Shia groups who supported the vizier Ibn al-Furāt considered Ḥallāj as dangerous as did the Sunni orthodox wing surrounding the “pious vizier” ‘Ali ibn ‘Isā. All of them were afraid that the effect on the people of spiritual revival might have repercussions on the social organization and even on the political structure.<sup>716</sup>

Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj instead emphasized the cultivation of love (*maḥabba*) which could lead to a union with God, but he was attacked by Ibn Dawūd, a leading expert on Zahiri Law and a Neoplatonist theorist of love, and a *fatwā* of denunciation was proposed to the Caliph against al-Ḥallāj.<sup>717</sup> Though spared an inquest by a Shafī‘i jurist who countered the *fatwā* with his own *fatwā* declaring the matter to be outside the purview of canonical law, al-Ḥallāj retreated to Mecca.<sup>718</sup> But after two years in Mecca, al-Ḥallāj returned to Baghdad to build a miniature Ka‘aba followed by the assertion “that it was permitted to substitute it for the pilgrimage itself if one was unable for financial or health reasons to visit the Holy City, according to the legal prescription for which he was accused of trying to overthrow the Islamic law, which makes Hajj, or the pilgrimage to Mecca, mandatory for every believer.”<sup>719</sup> He was arrested and given three days of public exposure in the pillory as a sentence. The next nine years were spent by Manṣūr in the royal palace in protective custody, where he composed many of his works. It is in these years that he

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<sup>715</sup> Ibid.

<sup>716</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 68.

<sup>717</sup> Herbert Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, 15-16

<sup>718</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid., 18.

wrote *Tā' Sīn al-Azal*, a work that considers 'Iblīs (Satan) as a pure monotheist because of his refusal to bow down to Adam.<sup>720</sup> A victim of Court intrigues, and corruption in the ministers of the Caliph, al-Ḥallāj was brought to trial amidst many public demonstrations in his favor by Ḥanbalite traditionalists, and his symbolic pilgrimage was used against him.<sup>721</sup> It is intriguing then that a Ḥanbalite traditionalist like Ibn Taymiyya would later denounce al-Ḥallāj. Ibn Taymiyya issued three *fatwās* which justified the sentence carried out against al-Ḥallāj where at one point he asserts “whoever approves of him must be killed like him.”<sup>722</sup>

We already find in Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj the use of the sort of short, pithy observational poem which reveals the intransience of this world that became popular in fifteenth-century North Indian Sufi-*bhaktī* worlds (the *vākhs* of Lal Ded, *shruks* of Nund Rishi and *dohās* of Baba Farid and Kabir). Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj's *qit'a* are only one or two lines long but resemble the popular Persian quatrain (*ruba'ī*). The *qit'a*, much like the *shruk* and the *vākh*, is restricted to a single theme. The effect elicited by the practice of poetry (or music) in Sufi gatherings was to enter into a state of *tawajjud* (being ecstatic).<sup>723</sup> The Sufis composed verse out of their ordinary experience of life which they found full of signs and warnings. The psychological impact of Sufi poetry was an essential component of its aesthetic dimension. Let us take, for example, the following poems by Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Lal Ded and Nund Rishi which also suggest a deep

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<sup>720</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>723</sup> Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence in their book on the Chishti Sufis translate *tawajjud* as “empathetic ecstasy.” Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 37.

interpenetration of Sufi and Hindu-Buddhist themes:

Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj:

One moment I'm a shaykh  
Who holds the highest rank,

And then I am a little child  
Dependent on a nurse  
Or sleeping in a box  
Within the brackish earth<sup>724</sup>

Lal Ded:

Now I see a flowing stream,  
now a flood that's drowned all bridges,  
now I see a bush flaming with flowers,  
now a skeleton of twigs.<sup>725</sup>

Nund Rishi:

In an instant, I see dew on earth  
In an instant, I see ashes on earth  
In an instant, I see a dark moonless night  
In an instant, I see bright the light of dawn<sup>726</sup>

There is a striking similarity of thematic: a quasi-cinematic montage, which with its rapid cut-like reversals, creates an understanding of temporal finitude. But Nund Rishi also invokes Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj directly in the *shruks* but not without a cautious dismissal of his declaration 'Ana al-Ḥaq (I am the Truth) as a mistake. In one of his *shruks* Nund Rishi speaks of how Manṣūr abandoned the fragrance of his realization by revealing the secret and getting himself stoned to death:

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<sup>724</sup> Herbert Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, 74.

<sup>725</sup> Ranjit Hoskote, *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Dēd* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), 34-35. A variant of this *vākh* as a *shruk* attributed to Nund Rishi has been quoted in the last chapter. The boundaries between the Lal Ded and Nund Rishi corpus are porous and often lead to thorny debates.

<sup>726</sup> This *shruk* is clearly modelled on Lal Ded and is likely a later interpolation into the Nund Rishi corpus. But the *vākh* quoted above and this *shruk* are often included in collections of Nund Rishi's *shruks*.

*Pāne khushbøe krāvun lacchey*  
*Pāne pān kani kani krovun*  
*Sharahuk soth byoth adu' patshe*  
*Dariyāv patu' yali mojā hvun*  
*Lāl tu' rattan prāvin dōtshe*<sup>727</sup>

He crushed the fragrance of the secret to dust  
He got himself stoned to death  
To restore the faith in the *Shar'iah*  
He saw the divine in a wave of the ocean  
He jumped in and found rubies and jewels

Yet Nund Rishi also praises Maṣṣūr's courage, as the declaration bore witness to divine unity in clearing the path to al-Ḥallāj's martyrdom. Nund Rishi also affirms that his martyrdom had reinforced the embankments of the *Shar'iah*. Maṣṣūr's declaration is seen here as nothing short of a flood that had to be contained through his martyrdom. In another *shruk* in a similar vein, Nund Rishi is more explicit:

*Ārifan āshiqan shobāh lājin*  
*Andric āwāz nyebār ko gā'e*  
*Sharahkis sothis sīrah wājin*  
*Adu' kāthas khorukh khabar gā'e*<sup>728</sup>

He honoured the gnostics and lovers with his courage  
How the inner secret got revealed?  
He hurled a brick at the dam of *Shar'iah*  
He had to climb the gallows  
And the news spread

Here Nund Rishi goes as far as to say that he had hurled a brick at the embankment of the *Sharī'ah*, which alone makes possible the flow of human lives. He did this because he wanted to glorify the gnostics and the lovers. Yet his inner secret was revealed and he had to climb the gallows. Nund Rishi considers Iblīs and Maṣṣūr to have been two figures that had not only been aware of the divine secret but also chose to

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<sup>727</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam*, 90.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

disclose it. Ḥallāj is known as *Ḥallāj-i asrār* (Hallaj of the secrets) in the Sufi tradition. Manṣūr paid with his life for this disclosure, just as Iblīs paid for it with his banishment. But Manṣūr’s disclosure is defended by Nund Rishi: even if the universe of meaning was threatened by Manṣūr’s disclosure, nonetheless Manṣūr sheltered the *Sharī‘ah* by accepting his punishment. Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi argues that Nund Rishi makes it clear that Manṣūr had uttered ‘*Ana al-Ḥaq*’ in a state of ecstasy whereas ‘Iblīs had willfully chosen to disobey God.’<sup>729</sup> But the theme of ‘Iblīs as a friend of Manṣūr is already there in Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj’s *Ṭawasin*.<sup>730</sup>

For the Sufis, the transformation of the heart was a far more fundamental concern than the disagreements about the *Shari‘ah*. Nund Rishi recalls the statement of Junayd al-Baghdādī that a Sufi does not learn what he learns by means of “it is said” (*qīl wa qāl*) but through a transformation of the state of the heart:

*Su chu nu’ wāchān qīlas ta qālas*  
*Su chu wāchān dīlkis hālas*

He does not look at “it is said”  
 He looks at the state of your heart

*Qīl wa qāl* can also be translated as “idle chatter” and, in this *shruk*, Nund Rishi privileges the state of the heart over idle talk about theology. Love, or ‘*ishq*, plays a fundamental role in the transformation of the heart. It is also a strong theme in Ḥanbalite traditionalism. But there are different approaches to love in Sufism. For instance, take the example of what al-Ḥallāj’s friend Shiblī has to say of his martyrdom:

Ours were the acts of lovers

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<sup>729</sup> Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, *Sufism and Rishism in Kashmir: The lesser known aspects of some Sufi orders*, 129.

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

Mad with love.  
Only my madness saved me,  
While his reason brought him death.<sup>731</sup>

A similar sentiment is to be found in Nund Rishi. He is cautious with his praise of al-Ḥallāj and also draws attention to the element of excess in Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj's ecstatic utterances. For Nund Rishi, Manṣūr reveals the secrets of Sufi Gnosticism and pays a price for it with his life:

*Māshūqan yali darshun hovun  
Darshan dyovun Mansūr sae  
Shauq-uk sharāb su yali tsovun  
Qatl krovun zan tsūr sae  
Kõngu' tu' kostūr tatu' yali novun  
Man manvo'un dār sae  
Āshiqan Ārifan vathā hāvan  
Kathā thāvan samsārsae<sup>732</sup>*

The moment the Beloved revealed a glimpse to Manṣūr  
Mansur received a vision  
He drank the wine of yearning  
And got himself killed like a thief  
He cleaned his body with musk and saffron  
And he prepared his heart for the gibbet  
He showed a new path to lovers and gnostics  
And left behind something enduring in the world

Here the relationship with God is approached as a difficult love, which ends in the annihilation of the lover in the beloved. In terms of Kashmiri Sufi poetry, Nund Rishi inaugurated a new binary between the 'ārif (the gnostic) and the 'āshiq (lover). It is often the moments at which Nund Rishi speaks of love that he also turns to Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj. One good way of approaching the Sufi theory of love in early medieval Indo-Persian Sufism is to turn to one of the foundational texts in the history of Sufism, *Kashf al-*

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<sup>731</sup> Herbert Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, 90.

<sup>732</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam*, 67.

*mahjūb* (Revelations of the Unseen), composed in Lahore by the Sufi al-Hujwīrī (Datta Ganj Baksh).<sup>733</sup> The Sufi psychologist al-Muḥasibī is quoted in *Kashf* as saying “Love is the vision of Him in hearts” and al-Ḥallāj’s friend Shibli is quoted thus on love: “Love obliterates from the heart all but the Beloved.”<sup>734</sup> It is this vision of love as that which leaves nothing intact, or in place, epitomized in Sufi poetry by the image of a moth annihilated by the flame (a metaphor which survives in Urdu poetry), that Nund Rishi invokes in relation to Manṣūr as a reader of the Qur’ān in this *shruk* which we first discussed in chapter 3:

*Qur’ān parān kono mūdikh*  
*Qur’ān parān goe no sūr*  
*Qur’ān parān zindu’ kyithu’ rūdikh*  
*Qur’ān parān dod Mansūr*

Did you not die after reading the Qur’ān?  
 How did you survive after reading the Qur’ān?  
 Did you not burn to ashes after reading the Qur’ān  
 Mansoor set himself on fire after reading the Qur’ān.<sup>735</sup>

The esoteric secret Manṣūr divulges then is connected by Nund Rishi to a reading of the Qur’ān. In this *shruk*, the only possible reading of the Qur’ān is apocalyptic. Manṣūr blurs the distinctions between the lawful and the unlawful, Islam and apostasy, Ka‘aba and the home. For instance, a nephew of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj found this note: “One who makes difference between kufr and iman he has committed infidelity and one who does not make difference between believer and non-believer he also commits

<sup>733</sup> ‘Ali ibn ‘Usman al-Hujviri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, tr. R A Nicholson (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1976).

<sup>734</sup> Herbert Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, 82, 84.

<sup>735</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam*, 37. This *shruk* is given as a set of two *shruks* in the Moti Lal Saqi collection.

infidelity.”<sup>736</sup> We see a paradoxical move in Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj: he challenges the *Sharī‘ah* and then surrenders his own life in a state of love. Love is a witnessing, *shuhūd*, which is connected in the Islamic tradition to not only the *shahādāh*, the first article of the Muslim faith proclaiming the unity of God, but also to *shahādāh*, martyrdom. A true reader of the Qur’ān can only be love’s martyr. The martyrdom of Maṣṣūr is no ordinary event in the history of Islam. It became a turning point in the history of Sufism. The legend of al-Ḥallāj, as told by Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, was well-known among the Sufis of India in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. The legend of Maṣṣūr’s martyrdom was, in particular, popular in Northwestern India, and “the folklore and vernacular songs of northwest India are full of references to Mansur (Hallaj) and his fate.”<sup>737</sup> Kashmir is no exception to this. As Schimmel puts it: “The country through which Ḥallāj had wandered once has received his message gladly in later times; his name is used here, as everywhere, as a symbol of suffering love and self-sacrifice at the one, of a measureless pantheistic feeling on the other hand.”<sup>738</sup>

Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj does not merely figure in Nund Rishi’s poetry but remains a significant figure in vernacular Kashmiri Sufi poetry into the present. The Sufis, however, remained internally divided about the fate of al-Ḥallāj. Most Sufis were quick to recognize the spiritual attainments of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj even if they considered it best to avoid the subject in public. A case in point is the Sufi thinker and Deoband theologian

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<sup>736</sup> Hamid Naseem Rafiabadi, *Sufism and Rishism in Kashmir: The Lesser Known Aspects of some Sufi Orders*, 113.

<sup>737</sup> Carl Ernst, “From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate,” *History of Religions* Vol. 24, No. 4 (May, 1985): 315.

<sup>738</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, “The Martyr-Mystic Ḥallāj in Sindhi Folk Poetry: Notes on a Mystical Symbol,” *Numen* Vol. 9, Fasc. 3 (Nov., 1962): 1616-67.

Maulana Ashraf ‘Alī Thānvī, who, in the early twentieth century, expressed his own thinking about the subject in a biography of Maṣṣūr published in the name of his disciple Zafar Aḥmad Usmānī. The reason why al-Ḥallāj was avoided as a subject in Sufi texts was the “potentially revolutionary implications of martyrdom.”<sup>739</sup> The martyrdom of al-Ḥallāj echoed the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn and threatened to open old wounds in Muslim politics. Carl Ernst reminds us that the Bengali Chishti saint, Ḥusam al-Dīn Mānikpūrī (d. 1418), a contemporary of Nund Rishi, also warned that al-Ḥallāj wasn’t the best model for novices to follow.<sup>740</sup> A prominent Suhrawardī Sufi such as Jalāl al-Dīn Bukhārī Makhdūm-i-Jahāniyān considered al-Ḥallāj’s execution as “justified both externally as an affront to the religious law and internally as a deliberate self-sacrifice.”<sup>741</sup> But soon South Asian Chishtis would have their own martyr in the Ḥallājian tradition: Mas‘ud Bakk. When the Chishti Sufi Mas‘ud Bakk was put to death in Delhi by Fīrūz Shāh Tughlaq, he too was hung from the gibbet and then burned like Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj.<sup>742</sup> South Asia also had its other Sufi martyrs such as Sarmad, a friend of the Sufi-inclined Mughal prince Dārā Shikoh, executed by Dārā Shikoh’s older brother Aurangzeb after his ascension to the Mughal throne.

What was at stake in Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj’s martyrdom? Or what were the uses to which it was put in Sufi poetry? As Carl Ernst puts it: “Martyrdom is the final resort of the weak against the powerful. It is an act of truth performed without regard for one’s

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<sup>739</sup> Carl Ernst, “From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate,” 315.

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>741</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>742</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

life.”<sup>743</sup> The whole question of martyrdom was connected to the question of speaking truth in the public. Ernst adds: “The Islamic world has also had martyrs who resisted tyranny and injustice at any cost, from Muhammad’s grandson Husayn to the self-sacrificing warriors who sought paradise through battle. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj is a figure who has had an extraordinary influence on the development of a Sufi martyrology. He also began to represent the embodiment of a Sufi reworking of death as life-affirming. Death appears here as the Beloved, or as a threshold that opens the gates to the Beloved. For Sufis, Manṣūr remained a model of the lover and the martyr. Manṣūr had actively courted martyrdom “at the hands of his fellow Muslims” and cried ‘Kill me, my trustworthy friends, for in my killing is my life.’”<sup>744</sup> But this martyrdom conferred eternal life on Manṣūr. As Nund Rishi puts it:

*Dāras lodukh kḥonu’ sanu’ mūdo*  
*Nāras loyukh tu’ rūd mo*  
*Āriḥo tu’ āshiḡo tave vodo*  
*Manṣūru’e os tu’ mūd mo*<sup>745</sup>

They pushed him to the gallows: he did not die  
 They threw him into the fire: he did not die  
 The gnostics and lovers cry of Manṣūr  
 But it is Manṣūr who does not die

This *shruk* plays on the meaning of Manṣūr as the victorious one. It is not the people who hanged Manṣūr, quartered his body and set it on fire, who emerge victorious. But it is Manṣūr’s tortured and quartered body, which bears witness to the truth of his love, that emerges victorious.

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<sup>743</sup> Ibid, 308.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>745</sup> Moti Lal Saḡi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam*, 90.

Al-Hallāj’s spiritual stature and “cruel death earned him the respect of many moderate Sufis, nonetheless his position remained ambiguous.”<sup>746</sup> Many Sufis even supported his execution, because “he had revealed the secret of divine lordship.”<sup>747</sup> This is how the Persian poet Ḥafiz puts it: “That friend by whom the gibbet’s peak was ennobled—his crime was this, that he made secrets public.”<sup>748</sup> Nund Rishi put it in more or less the same words:

*Charra pyeyās kau’ sanu’ tsājīn*  
*Manṣūr Kākas vuhu’ nājīn ga’e*  
*Shanti ḥanze kre k̄yeth sodu’ vājīn*  
*Andric ās tu’ khabar nyēbar kath peye*<sup>749</sup>

Why did not Manṣūr bear the blow of the Divine flash?  
 Why did it leave him shattered?  
 Why did he uproot the path of peace?  
 How did the inner secret get revealed?

Here Nund Rishi raises the question of why he couldn’t just bear the burn of the divine flash, and why the encounter with the divine had left Manṣūr shattered. Yet again he asks why Nund Rishi revealed the secret. In her study of the figure of al-Hallaj in the mystical poetry of Sachal Sarmast, Annemarie Schimmel writes that the public proclamation of Hallaj, the revelation of the secret, is “likened to the sound of the great kettle-drum: proclaiming by kettle-drum means ‘to announce publicly’, and it was just Hallaj’s greatest disadvantage in the eyes of his fellow-mystics that he had disclosed the highest secret of loving unity.”<sup>750</sup> This was also the attitude of the Kashmiri Sufis. He was

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<sup>746</sup> Carl Ernst, “From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate,” 315.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid.

<sup>749</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-‘Ālam*, 76.

<sup>750</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, “The Martyr-Mystic Ḥallāj in Sindhi Folk Poetry: Notes on a Mystical Symbol,” *Numen* Vol. 9, Fasc. 3 (Nov., 1962): 189.

reproached for having divulged the secret of an esoteric tradition. There appears now to be a connection with the drum we encountered in chapter 4 that announces in the apocalyptic and love. Love is the secret, and those who speak openly of it must be prepared to pay a heavy price. The secret that Maṣṣūr revealed without revealing becomes a trope in Kashmiri Sufi poetry. The legend of Maṣṣūr was so popular in Kashmir that in an eighteenth-century Kashmiri *tarīkh*, the Kashmiri Saivite *yoginī*, Lal Ded is called a sister of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj.<sup>751</sup>

Annemarie Schimmel, the pre-eminent scholar of Islamic mysticism, writes in an essay on al-Ḥallāj as a mystical symbol in Sindhi poetry, that she was surprised when traveling in Sindh in 1961 to find out “that everybody in the remotest corners of the Indus valley” seemed to know of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj.<sup>752</sup> The reason Schimmel gives for the popularity of Mansur’s ideas in Sindh could hold just as true for Kashmir albeit for a different historical period (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century Kashmir):

A certain interest in mystical speculations is likely to have grown there rather early—a large part of the population were Hindu, and there was also a deeper layer of Buddhist elements; the ideas of Buddhism and—a quite unorthodox—Hinduism may have acted as a ferment in the development of religious thought in the country during the early Islamic period...<sup>753</sup>

But the popularity of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj was not restricted to Sindh, and he was popular in regions as far away from Sindh as Chittagong. Schimmel adds:

...it would be wrong to assume that mystical poetry of this kind is found only in the lower parts of the Indus valley: Panjabi folk-poetry and mystical literature contains outstanding examples which mention Hallaj and his fate, and poetical references to his death on the gibbet trace in this area at least as far back as Kabir (d. 1495). Already Hujwiri (d. after 1073), one of the first mystics who settled in Lahore, has composed, besides his famous *kashf al-mahjūb*, a separate book on Ḥallāj so that the continuity of the tradition in this part of the

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<sup>751</sup> R L Bhat, “Political Content in the Vaakhs of Lal Ded” in *Cultural Heritage of Kashmiri Pandits*, eds. S. S. Toshkhani and K. Warikoo (Delhi: Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, 2009),

<sup>752</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, “The Martyr-Mystic Ḥallāj in Sindhi Folk Poetry: Notes on a Mystical Symbol,” *Numen* Vol. 9, Fasc. 3 (Nov., 1962): 161.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

subcontinent is given. In Pashto literature the name of Hallaj is also popular... Muslim Bengali poetry will surely contain numerous verses on the martyr mystic – a “magnifique éloge” on Hallaj under the name *Maharshi Manşūr* has been signalized by L. Massignon.<sup>754</sup>

According to Schimmel, Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Besarnama* (the letter on being-without-head, or being *be sar*) inspired many poets in Sindh and ‘Aṭṭār’s allegories of love from *Manṭiq uṭ-Ṭayr* (Conference of Birds) were well-known all the way up to Kashmir.<sup>755</sup> If Maulana Rūmī compared al-Ḥallāj’s state to that of “iron in fire,” Maḥmūd Shabistārī compared al-Ḥallāj’s state to that of the Burning Bush from which God spoke to Moses. In South Asia, the Ḥallāj legend was particularly strong in the Qādirī Order. In Ḥallāj’s fate, the Hurūfī martyr Nesimi and the Shi‘a missionary Pīr Sulṭān Abdāl could anticipate their own executions. The Ḥallāj legend found its way into Persian, Pashto, Sindhi, Urdu, Bengali and Kashmiri. In some of these texts, Ḥallāj is represented as a victim of the jealous *mullahs*. It wasn’t Muslims alone who wrote about Ḥallāj: a *Qiṣṣa-e Manşūr* in Urdu was written by Shivarajpuri (d. 1750) in Lucknow.<sup>756</sup> Dervishes like Lāl Shāhbāz Qalandar of Sehwan also composed verses that invoked Manşūr al-Ḥallāj and his martyrdom. The Sindhi mystic and poet, Sachal Sarmast calls himself “the Mansur of this last time who utters the cry I am the Truth openly (*ashikar*).”<sup>757</sup> In Sindhi mystical poetry, Manşūr is “an unchangeable symbol of love and union through suffering.”<sup>758</sup> Shah ‘Abdul Laṭīf speaks of human suffering and love in his poetry: “The gibbet is first the ornament of the lovers ... the resolution to be killed is essential for loving people ...

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<sup>754</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid., 177.

the very gibbet becomes the nuptial bed for the lovers ... (Kalyan II 3-9).”<sup>759</sup> The very word *Manṣūr* means “victorious” and the idea of Sufi martyrdom was connected to a spiritual victory. As Schimmel puts it: “To die in the contemplation of God’s eternal beauty is the goal of all the great lovers during the centuries...”<sup>760</sup> Such ideas are also to be found in the *bhakti* poet, Kabir:

That death which the world fears so much is my happiness  
When shall I die and when shall I contemplate Him who is highest bliss? <sup>761</sup>

We also see that Sufi poets like Sachal Sarmast connect this martyrdom, the voluntary dying on the gibbet, with the older Sufi idea of “die before you die”:

Thou hast not yet passed away from self,  
Hast not mounted on the gallows-tree,  
Hast not died before dying—  
How canst thou be called lover,  
How canst thou say I am the Truth? <sup>762</sup>

The idea of love is connected to this dying, and the lovers are supposed to be inclined towards the gibbet. It is the gallows that is declared to be the place proper for loving people. <sup>763</sup> Annemarie Schimmel speculates that it was Ḥallāj’s ideas that led the Mughal Prince Dārā Shikoh to study the Upanishads and Vedanta. Dara Shikoh’s friend, Sarmad, who had fallen in love with a Hindu boy in Thatta, Sindh, and had embraced Islam, compared himself to Ḥallāj in one of his last verses:

It is a life long that the voice of Mansur became old—  
I’ll give anew the manifestation of gallows and rope! <sup>764</sup>

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<sup>759</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid., 169.

Sarmad was transformed into a Ḥallāj-like figure in South Asian Sufism. There also appear to have been other heretical Sufis who invoked Ḥallāj, whose idea of love had become emblematic of nothing less than an idea of political rebellion. The gallows and the gibbet are often opposed to the preacher's pulpit in Islamic mystical poetry. As one of the most popular Urdu poets of the nineteenth century, Ghalib, puts it: "You can say it on the gallows, but not from the pulpit."<sup>765</sup> In Sindhi mystical poetry, the gibbet motif appears with that of *be-sari* (being-without-head). As another Sindhi mystical poet Shah Abdul Latif puts it: "Those who are from Mansur, those necks were cut."<sup>766</sup> For Sachal Sarmast, "the head of the lover is the polo-ball in the polostick of the curls of the Beloved—with the Hallajian tradition: those who have uttered the cry of Divinity have made their heads balls in the arena."<sup>767</sup> According to Schimmel

In the moment that Hallaj gives his head to the impaling stake he realizes the highest mystery of the ascension, that of the prophetic hadith *lī ma'aa Allāh...* "I have a time with God" which points to the immediate nearness of man and God where not even Gabriel can interfere, and has been one of the key-words of Sufism through the ages.<sup>768</sup>

The nearness of man and God is the secret Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj is accused of having divulged. The Sufis also posed the question of God's silence on Ḥallāj's martyrdom and expressed despair about the killing of love's martyrs. When Ḥallāj's friend, Shiblī, asked God why and how long were God's lovers to be killed, the answer he received was: "Those whom I kill their blood money is upon me and I (or 'My Beauty') am their blood

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<sup>765</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, "The Martyr-Mystic Ḥallāj in Sindhi Folk Poetry: Notes on a Mystical Symbol," 181. The complete verse of Ghalib, which clearly alludes to Mansur al-Hallaj's martyrdom, is: "The secret in your heart is not a sermon/ You can say it on the gallows, but not from the pulpit."

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>768</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

money.”<sup>769</sup> God himself is the recompense for the blood of these martyrs. As Shāh Laṭīf puts it: “Bloodmoney is the Beloved for those who have died on the road.”<sup>770</sup> A Sindhi proverb gathers together the political force of the Ḥallāj legend in Sindh: “The whole country abounds in Manṣūr – how many of them wouldst thou put to death?”<sup>771</sup>

The resolute yet also love-intoxicated martyrdom of Manṣūr is seen as the true measure of martyrdom in the path of God. Love is the wine which Ḥallāj, headless (*be sar*) was seen holding in his hand in a dream by someone after his execution. In one of his *shruks*, Nund Rishi speaks of Manṣūr’s intoxication with love:

*Saras manz vatshāv po’u’ ko’u’ trovun*  
*Chon māne chu vati viy*  
*Qurb ās bod tu’ drās hāvun*  
*Bovun sir rūd adau’ pava’e*

He stepped into the ocean  
 But missed his step  
 He drank openly at the crossroads  
 He reached a nearness  
 But his state was revealed  
 He uttered the secret  
 And lost his station

This wine attained only through pain and suffering is also the wine of the unity of being, an idea we first encounter in chapter 3. As Schimmel puts it, Ḥallāj’s is “the goblet of martyrdom from the winestore of Not-Being which the lover is asked to drink.”<sup>772</sup> Wine as a symbol of unitive experience is by no means restricted to Islamic mysticism. Wine leads to *be khudī*, a state of selflessness or non-awareness, in which the beloved may even get you killed. *Be khudī* is the state of a true lover who himself or herself is empty.

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<sup>769</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>770</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>771</sup> Ibid.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid., 187.

Only selflessness can teach the meaning of Ḥallāj's *'Anā al-Haq* ("I am the Truth"). Annemarie Schimmel writes that the Urdu poet and modernist, Iqbal, also has depicted Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj as an exponent of the Upanishadic *aham brahmāsmi*.<sup>773</sup>

As Carl Ernst puts it, in a 1992 Festschrift essay in the honor of Schimmel, Ḥallāj's position "is one of the boldest formulations of Islamic mysticism."<sup>774</sup> The problem with Ḥallāj's approach to the thinking of the divine as Love is the lack of a scriptural basis in the Qur'ān. According to the tenth-century Sufi and philosopher, al-Daylamī, Ḥallāj was isolated among the Sufis for holding that love is the divine essence.<sup>775</sup> Nund Rishi declares: "Nothing separates me from Maṣṣūr." This too is a bold statement to make in the context of Sufism in medieval Kashmir. But Nund Rishi's insistence on the *Shar'īah*, in the same *shruks* in which he invokes Maṣṣūr, reveals that this is a cautious affirmation during politically turbulent times. The other Sufis whom Nund Rishi invokes in his *shruks* such as Rūmī are also exemplars of what William C. Chittick calls "the Sufi path of love" as opposed to "the Sufi path of knowledge." Vernacular Sufism in the Punjab, Kashmir and Sindh appears to have turned more often to the "Sufi path of love" than the "Sufi path of knowledge." Nund Rishi unambiguously affirms the Sufi path of love in his *shruks* on *'ishq*. Carl Ernst writes in his essay about *'ishq* in a later Sufi figure such as Rūzbihān Baqlī, one of the followers of al-Ḥallāj in the Persianate Sufi tradition, that, for the Ḥallāj scholar Louis Massignon, it was the idea

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<sup>773</sup> Ibid., 199-200.

<sup>774</sup> Carl Ernst, "Rūzbihān Baqlī on Love as Essential Desire," in *God is Beautiful and He loves Beauty: Festschrift in honour of Annemarie Schimmel presented by students, friends and colleagues on April 7, 1992*, eds. Alma Giese and J. Christoph Bürgel (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 181.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid., 182.

of divine love “that brought Sufism in contact with Hellenistic philosophy.”<sup>776</sup> Even though such an idea of love can be traced back to the pre-Socratics and was taken up by Islamic peripatetic philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā, Ḥallāj attempted “a radical decentering of human desire, for a metaphysical reorientation.”<sup>777</sup> Let us take a closer look at the idea of *‘ishq* in Rūzbihān Baqlī’s *‘Abhar al-‘āshiqīn*:

... ‘Ishq is one of the attributes of the Real; He himself is His own lover (‘āshiq). Therefore, love, lover, and beloved are one. From that love there is a single color, for the Attribute is He, and He is above the changing of temporality.<sup>778</sup>

As Ernst reminds us, the key term here is *‘ishq*, “or passionate love, of non-Qur’ānic origin and similar in connotation to the Greek **eros**.”<sup>779</sup> Ernst adds that the scriptural purists preferred the milder term *maḥabba*, or compassionate love, which had the advantage of being of Qur’ānic origin.<sup>780</sup> For Nund Rishi, *‘ishq* never comes into opposition with *Sharī‘ah* and, if it does, the *Sharī‘ah* must take precedence. But Nund Rishi never abandons his commitment to Maṣūūr’s path. This conserves Maṣūūr for both the conservative Sufis and the radicals. But little is revealed of Maṣūūr’s secret for which he pays with his own life. It is hinted that the secret is the secret of love.

Maṣūūr al-Ḥallāj wasn’t the only Sufi to speak of love. There was more than one way in which *‘ishq* posed problems for Sufi theology. For example, in the early history of Sufism, Abū al-Ḥaṣan al-Nūrī speaks of *‘ishq* in ways suggestive of eroticism and anthropomorphism for which he was charged with heresy by the caliphal court.<sup>781</sup> Al-

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<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid.

<sup>778</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid., 188.

Nūrī is supposed to have said: “I love (a‘shaqu) God and He loves (ya‘shaqu) me.”<sup>782</sup>

The claim to a personal relation to God is something which appears to have been most troubling for theologians who remained committed to the idea of God’s absolute transcendence. But there were enough verses in the Qur’ān that supported Sufi speculations on the relations between man and God. The question here is what is the meaning of *‘ishq* we encounter in Nund Rishi’s poetry. The idea of a Ḥallājīan *‘ishq* clearly influenced the development of this theme in early Kashmiri mystical poetry and survives as late as the poems of Ahad Zargar in the twentieth century. But *‘ishq* had become less of a controversial term by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries than it was at the time of Ḥallāj. Ernst has argued that there are two sources for this idea of *‘ishq* in Sufi poetry: pre-Socratics and the traditional sources of Islam i.e., Qur’ān and the Hadīth.<sup>783</sup> Let us now turn to the *shruks* where Nund Rishi directly addresses the question of *‘ishq*:

*‘Ashiq su yus pāk rachi badan  
Lā shaq horu’ chas khadmu’ tsi  
Āh vōshi su’ t yus lydrāvih badan  
Mokhu’ mokhu’ vuchiy tas pryeth soratsu’  
Sārni bronth pāvīy janatas ladan  
Tim yim yatiy lolu’ vudnis yaṭsū*<sup>784</sup>

A lover is the one who keeps his body pure  
There is no doubt that the houris attend them in Paradise  
The lover sees the Beloved in every face  
The lover shall enter Paradise before all else  
The lovers are those who keep vigil at night

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<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

<sup>783</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>784</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu’*, 197.

In this *shruk*, Nund Rishi connects the figure of the *'āshiq* to traditional Islamic piety, or *zuhd*, which is rewarded in Paradise. There is little that separates the believer (*momin*) from the lover (*'āshiq*) in this *shruk*. The Sufi idea of love as a difficult trial by fire appears in the following *shruk*:

*'Āshiq su yus 'ashqu' nāre daze*  
*Sōn zan prazlyās panunu'e pān*  
*'Ashqun dod yas vālinji saze*  
*Su adu' vate lā makān*<sup>785</sup>

The lover is the one who burns in the fire of love  
The lover is the one burns to pure gold in the fire  
The one with the pain of love deep in his heart  
He is the one who shall reach the placeless Place

Love is seen here as a suffering without which one can never hope to reach the *lā makān* (placeless place). If we compare this *shruk* to the one from Chapter 3 where Nund Rishi speaks of his own journey to the *lā makān* (the No Place, or the Placeless Place), we can conclude that Nund Rishi connects the kenosis of asceticism to the fire of love:

*La Illāhā ṣahih korum*  
*Waḥi korum panun pān*  
*Wūjūd travith mūjūd myūlum*  
*Adu' bu' votus lā makān*<sup>786</sup>

I decided on “There is no god but God”  
And made of my self a site of revelation  
Abandoning existence, I found presence  
Thus have I reached the place-less place

In yet another *shruk*, Nund Rishi further complicates his idea of *'ishq* by speaking of it in a sequence of violent metaphors:

*'Ishq chu'e māji kun pothar marun*  
*Sō'e zōlu' kare tu' kḥ*

<sup>785</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'*, 198.

<sup>786</sup> Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam*, 29.

*'Ishq chu'e gan' tularih byeb barun  
Su ha'e soḳh bare tu' kaḥ  
'Ishq chu'e tez kartaji chanci darun  
Su' he chōkh zare tu' kaḥ*<sup>787</sup>

Love is the loss of a mother's only son  
If she wants to sleep, how will she?  
Love is taking in a beehive into your lap  
If she wants to be happy, how can she?  
Love is withstanding the blow of a sharp sword  
If she wants to be wounded, how can she?

There is little that separates Love here from violence. Love is a sudden, and violent, experience of loss. In another of his *shruks*, Nund Rishi returns to the relation between kenosis and love:

*Lolik vōkhalu' vānij pishim  
Kōkal chajim tu' byuthus rasae  
Pishim tu' pishim pānas tsu'shim  
Kovu' zānu' tavu' sāt maru'h kinu' lasu'*<sup>788</sup>

The stir of love melts my heart  
I abandoned evil and am just sitting  
I got reduced, reduced, and sunk into the self  
I don't know now if I'll live or die

The relation claimed by Nund Rishi with Ḥallāj was by no means unique. Such mystics as 'Aṭṭār and Ruzbihan Baqli, as we have seen, also claimed a special relationship with Ḥallāj and so did the Sufis of Sindh. The claim to such a relationship was also a claim to a special – and secret – spiritual initiation.

The claims to special relationships and secret initiations weren't restricted to those who considered themselves in the intellectual and spiritual inheritance of mystic rebels such as Ḥallāj. But they were also invoked by those Sufis at the margins of Islam's

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<sup>787</sup> Amin Kamil, *Nūrnāmu'*, 199.

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

Central and Eastern lands who could not trace their spiritual lineage either to ‘Ali or Abū Bakr or any other Sufi saint, a *sine qua non* for Sufi teaching. Nund Rishi also invokes this idea of a secret initiation; but, as with many other such concepts formative of the Islamic tradition, he often interprets it in a unique way. The asceticism, sexual celibacy and vegetarianism of the Rishi Order had already posed a challenge for Nund Rishi’s new religious movement in a faith where the formula *Lā rahbāniyya fī al-Islām* (there is no asceticism in Islam) had become popular.<sup>789</sup> The way Nund Rishi approaches the problem of asceticism in the Rishi Order is by tracing its genealogy to early Islam and one of the first ascetics of Islam, Uways al-Qarnī, who was praised for his piety by none other than the Prophet Muḥammad. This made it possible for Nund Rishi to ally himself to early *zuhd* (asceticism) and counter the accusations being made against the Rishis about their lack of conformity with the *Sharī‘ah*.

Nund Rishi addresses the anxiety over the influence of Hindu-Buddhist ascetic practices on the Rishi Order by calling Prophet Muḥammad as the first Rishi (*awwal Rishī*). The Sanskrit term *rishī* acquires thus a new meaning in the Kashmiri vernacular and indexes Rishism as the site of a double translation from the technical languages of Sufi as well as Hindu-Buddhist spirituality. Nund Rishi not only connects the Rishis to the early history of Islam but he also situates Muhammad at the beginning of all Rishis as

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<sup>789</sup> Prophet Muhammad had warned against the extremes of asceticism and urged marriage as completion of half of the *dīn* (faith). There is no precedence to vegetarianism in the early Islamic tradition, and this would often come up in the relations between the Rishis and Sufis of other Persian Orders in Kashmir. Nund Rishi approached these contradictions by problematizing the binaries between asceticism and orthodox Islam: for instance, he not only criticized a merely ritualistic adherence to the *Sharī‘ah* but he also rejected the idea of asceticism for its own sake. It is this double critique which enables Nund Rishi to open up a third space without entering into a confrontation with Islamic theology. The Rishis practiced vegetarianism but never criticized non-vegetarianism. Even when directly confronted about it contradicting the practice of the *Sunnah*, they appear to have been conciliatory rather than antagonistic.

the first Rishi. The paradox of a Kashmiri Order of Muslim Rishis laying claim to the spiritual history of early Islam is reflected in the following *shruk* where Nund Rishi addresses the question of his spiritual lineage:

*Avval Rishī Aḥmad Rishī  
Doyum Uways Qarnī āv  
Treyum Rishi Zalk' Rishī  
Tsūryum Hazrat Palās āv  
Pūntsyum Rishī Rume Rishī  
Sheyum Hazrat Mīrān āv  
Ṣatīm qarū 'm du 'shnā hishī  
Bu ' nu 'k unh tu ' mye kyā nāv?*<sup>790</sup>

The first Rishi is Aḥmad Rishi (Muḥammad)  
The second Rishi is Uways  
The third Rishi is Zalka Rishi  
The fourth Rishi is Palās Rishi  
The fifth Rishi is Ruma Rishi  
The sixth Rishi is Mīrān Rishi  
The seventh they thought a Rishi  
What Rishi am I? What is my name?

Why does Nund Rishi propose such a genealogy? Why does he invoke Uways al Qarnī?

Why are Muḥammad and Uways al-Qarnī followed by the legendary Rishis of Kashmir?

Why is Kashyapa Rishi, associated with the myths of origin in Kashmir in such texts as

*Nīlamata Purāṇa* (composed between the sixth and the eight century of the Christian

Era), missing from this genealogy?<sup>791</sup> These are not easy questions to answer. But the

major question of lineage, which Nund Rishi foregrounds here, indicates the degree to

which tensions over caste and ethnicity marked Kashmiri society. By calling Muhammad

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<sup>790</sup> A variant of the last line reads: *Bu ' kus Rishī mye kyāh nāv* (What Rishi am I? What is my name?). See Moti Lal Saqi, *Kulliyāt-e Shaikh al-'Ālam*, 33.

<sup>791</sup> Kashyapa Rishi appears in Kashmir's myths of origin, and some commentators of Kashmir even trace the name Kashmir to Kashyapa Rishi. These myths of origin are layered and require a more detailed investigation. See, for instance, Ved Kumari Ghai, *Nilamatapurana* (Srinagar: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1968).

the first *Rishī*, Nund Rishi sends the roots of the Rishi movement into the originary moment of Islamic revelation, and at the same time places Muhammad among the first of the seers and sages of ancient India (in its Proto-Indo-European meaning, the word *rishī* is also close to the meaning of Muhammad in Arabic).

Nund Rishi circumvents the controversies around medieval Sufism by invoking the history of early Islam. The move to begin with Prophet Muḥammad could also be considered as an element of those Sufi discourses that put the creation of a Muhammadan light (*nūr-i Muḥammadī*) before the creation of Adam at the origins of human history. And the choice of the second Rishi as Uways al-Qarnī is equally interesting. Nund Rishi considered himself an *Uwaysī* because Uways al-Qarnī, a Yemeni Sufi, had claimed direct spiritual initiation by the Prophet Muḥammad. Such an initiation came to be known as an *Uwaysī* initiation. By invoking Uways al-Qarnī, Nund Rishi not only lays claim to a similar initiation by Prophet Muhammad, but also legitimizes a Sufi Order which traces its genealogy to such legendary Rishis of Kashmir as Zalka Rishi, Palās Rishi, Ruma Rishi, and Mīrān Rishi. The reason the turn to Uways al-Qarnī is critical is because he is one of those early Islamic ascetics most praised by Prophet Muhammad for their devotion in reports from the canonical books of *hadīth*. Uways bridges the gap between the universalizing history of early Islam with local Kashmiri spiritual history.

Even though Nund Rishi considered himself an *Uwaysī* (a term invoked by Sufis, who consider their spiritual master physically absent), it is the Hindu Saivite Lal Ded whom Nund Rishi explicitly invokes as one of his *gurus* (teachers).<sup>792</sup> By tracing the

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<sup>792</sup> On Lal Ded, see Jaishree Kak Odin, *Mystical Verses of Lalla: a journey to self-realization* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007).

genealogy of the Rishis to the Prophet Muḥammad and proclaiming the Hindu woman saint-poet Lal Ded and other Kashmiri Rishis as his *gurus*, Nund Rishi not only secures the foundation of the Rishi Order but also provincializes the history of Islam to Kashmir.<sup>793</sup> Nund Rishi achieved this not only through the use of the Kashmiri vernacular, his critique of caste, and his turn to the peasantry, but also by invoking the *zuhd* (asceticism) of early Islam against the mystical theology of the immigrant Sufis.

The Islam Nund Rishi evokes against the new Muslim Sultanate in Kashmir and the immigrant Persian Sufi Orders corresponds to the Islam of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Maulana Rūmī, and other such early Islamic ascetics as Uways al-Qarnī. If, with the figure of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, we are right at the heart of controversies over Sufism and theology in medieval Islam, the figure of Uways al-Qarnī opens up its own set of questions about religion and politics. The turn to Uways al-Qarnī helps Nund Rishi resolve a serious problem: it helps to establish the legitimacy of the Rishi Order as a Sufi Order at a time when most Sufi Orders had to trace their lineage to ‘Alī, the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad and the fourth Caliph of Islam, or to an established Sufi Master. Thus the turn to Uways al-Qarnī allowed Nund Rishi to not only claim direct initiation from the Prophet, but also pose such questions of race, caste, and power, which had been made obscure by the theological discourses of highly sophisticated networks of medieval Sufism.

In medieval Sufism, some Sufis were considered as *Uwaysīs* because they claimed an esoteric initiation by Prophet Muḥammad; but all Sufis were taken to be ‘*Awliyā Allah*

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<sup>793</sup> Here too Nund Rishi affirms the path of such Sufi Masters as Ibn al-‘Arabī, who regarded Fatima of Cordova as his spiritual teacher.

(or Friends of Allah). Uways al-Qarnī had accepted Islam at the time of the Prophet's life but without himself ever having seen the Prophet. Thus the figure of Uways al-Qarnī anticipates all the problems which one would encounter in the study of a figure like Nund Rishi. A. S. Hussanini writes in his essay about Uways al-Qarnī that many biographers of the Prophet, such as Ibn Ishāq and Wāqidī, do not mention Uways at all.<sup>794</sup> Imam Mālik went so far as to reject his existence.<sup>795</sup> Even as Imam Bukhārī mentions Uways, he considers those traditions as “weak.”<sup>796</sup> But many others do mention him.

Ḥishām al-Dustāwī was the first author to mention Uways.<sup>797</sup> But another prominent traditionist, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjaj, mentions Uways. Let us look at the tradition from Muslim in more detail:

Muslim mentions, on the authority of Asīr b. Jabīr, the deputation from Kufa... ‘Umar asked them: “Is there any person among you called Uways, for, I heard the Prophet saying, ‘There will come unto you (i.e., ‘Umar) a person from Yaman called Uways, leaving behind his mother. He will have suffered from leprosy (*bars*), but, after praying to God, he was cured except for a white spot equal to a dinar or a dirham. When you meet him request him to ask forgiveness for you from God.”<sup>798</sup>

The caliph ‘Umar also quoted the Prophet as saying that Uways will be the best of the *Tabi‘ūn* (the generation born after the Prophet but contemporary with his Companions).<sup>799</sup> It is written that Uways preferred to live in obscurity and died in a battle most likely fought on the side of ‘Alī at Siffīn.<sup>800</sup> But why exactly is Uways so central to the Sufis? Uways was a renowned ascetic (*zāhid*) of his time and his appearance with ‘Alīds at the battle of Siffīn hints at the massive political significance of the Uways

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<sup>794</sup> A. S. Hussanini, “Uways al-Qarnī and the Uwaysī Sūfīs,” *Muslim World* 57 (1967): 104.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

legend. Some of his contemporaries even considered Uways to be mad. It is with Hujwārī, the Sufi who settled down in Lahore and the author of the famous treatise *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, that the legend of Uways “soars to tremendous heights.”<sup>801</sup> The centrality of Uways to Nund Rishi may owe much to the popularity of *Kashf al-Mahjūb* in medieval North India. Hujwārī mentions that the people of Kufa said about Uways: “He is a madman, who dwells in solitude and associates with no one. He does not eat what others eat, and feels no joy or sorrow. When others smile, he weeps, and when others weep, he smiles.”<sup>802</sup> According to Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attar, ‘Umar and ‘Ali were both commissioned by the Prophet to deliver his mantle to Uways as a gift.<sup>803</sup> Hussanini concludes:

It seems to me that such a person as Uways really existed and that he embraced Islam without learning its tenets from anyone. Although he lived during the lifetime of the Prophet he was prevented from meeting the Prophet, according to Hujwārī, ‘firstly by the ecstasy which overmastered him and secondly by the duty to his mother.’ There is no doubt, however, that the Prophet and his Companions knew about him.<sup>804</sup>

Nund Rishi’s turn to Uways al-Qarnī, and hence Nund Rishi’s self-insertion into the chain which goes back to Prophet Muḥammad, secures a legitimate foundation for his Sufi Order. The love of Prophet Muḥammad was a significant element of *Uwaysī* ideas.<sup>805</sup> The genealogy Nund Rishi speaks of is imaginary (if still powerful or perhaps even more so) and bears a striking resemblance to similar genealogies in ex-Soviet Central Asia (to which Kashmir is geographically close). Julian Baldick has done a detailed study of this history of the *Uwaysīs* that develops our understanding of the

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>805</sup> The element of the love of the Prophet in the *Uwaysī* phenomenon had a radical consequence. As Julian Baldick writes: “The position of the Uwaysi is really, as we have seen, the position of every Muslim with regard to Muhammad: like Uways himself, the believer has not met the Prophet in the flesh.” Julian Baldick, *Imaginary Muslims: The Uwaysi Sufis of Central Asia* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 226-227.

*Uwaysī* phenomenon at the fringes of the mainstream Islamic mystical tradition.<sup>806</sup>

Baldick writes: “The words of the Qur’an are extremely hard to understand, and Arabic is not the native tongue of most Muslims. Accordingly, the Uwaysi method had the advantages of overcoming barriers of time, space and language.”<sup>807</sup> Baldick adds that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Sufism “was often combined with Shiism in the context of revolutionary political activity, but on the other hand, there was a lot of unoriginal, academic writing of commentaries on earlier masterpieces, along with superficial displays of literary virtuosity.”<sup>808</sup> In the medieval period, Sufism insisted on a spiritual director, an elder (*shaykh* or *pīr*), for the aspiring mystic. Baldick writes:

According to a well-known adage, ‘He who has no elder has Satan for his elder.’ The elder is the indispensable physician of the soul. However, there always have been some mystics outside the pale of Sufism and the usual elder-disciple relationship. These mystics would often fall under the general heading of ‘dervishes’, a word which literally means ‘poor people’ (Persian *darwishan*), but came to mean ‘people of the spiritual life’. Sufis also fall under this heading, but not all dervishes are Sufis. An Uwaysi, then, is a dervish who apparently has no elder or instructor, but claims to receive guidance from Muhammad or some other invisible teacher.<sup>809</sup>

The *Tadhkirā al-awliyā*, a text which remains extremely popular in South Asian Sufism, already mandates that there is a class of people who call themselves the *Uwaysīs* and “do not need an ‘elder’ because they acquire their instruction from Muḥammad directly.”<sup>810</sup> The tendency came to India, where one of the greatest mystics and theologians of medieval times, Ahmad Sirhindī (1564-1624), claimed initiation through Muḥammad via Naqshbandi intermediaries.<sup>811</sup> The turn to an appeal to *Uwaysī* initiation

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<sup>806</sup> Julian Baldick, *Imaginary Muslims: The Uwaysi Sufis of Central Asia* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>807</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>808</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

thus appears to have gone hand in hand with a critique of the conditions of the Empire. This is true not only of Sirhindi's critique of the Mughals, also of Üveys ibn Mehmed's critique of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>812</sup> Even Ibn al-‘Arabī, who clearly is one of the greatest of the Sufi thinkers, had no clear masters and speaks of “mysterious encounters with hidden ‘friends of God’ and the enigmatic prophet Khidr.”<sup>813</sup> The role of Shī‘ite influences on these schemas is obvious but beyond the scope of this study.

The rise of the *Uwaysī* phenomenon coincides with the crisis of Islam in the medieval period after the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258. In all reports about Uways, it is clear that he embraced Islam without knowing about Islam. This returns us to our fundamental question in relation to Nund Rishi: is it possible to arrive at an Islam unmediated by previously acquired theological knowledge? The legend of Uways clearly suggests the possibility of an Islam beyond doctrine, hence universal in its appeal. Not only does it open up Islam to the political demands of the subaltern (claimed by the Sufis to be the original intent of the Prophet and his Companions), it also makes the question of lineage (race or caste) irrelevant.

It is this very idea of a universal Islam, an Islam before and beyond theological knowledge, which is at stake in Nund Rishi's mystical poetry. Nund Rishi often uses the Sanskrit term *sahaja* to name such an Islam. He explicitly calls the Qur’ān the *Sahaja Qur’ān*:

*Haz Rasūlas kāmat tsājī*  
*Tsey tas sūzuth sahas Qur’ān*  
*Bhugih su yam riyādhāt pājī*  
*Chuham tseytas tsu’ maharbān*

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<sup>812</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid., 29.

You freed the Prophet from desire  
You revealed to him the *Sahaja* Qur'ān  
God, the one who followed asceticism  
I remember how gracious you are!

In this *shruk*, the *Sahaja* Qur'ān is revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad on the path of *riyādhāt* (which is derived from an Arabic word for 'spiritual exercises'). In this *shruk*, Nund Rishi also addresses God as *Bhugih* which is a derivative of the Sanskrit noun *bhaga* for wealth that gives us the word *Bhagavān* for the divine, and that is still in use in Sanskrit and modern Hindi. *Sahaja* was used as an adjective in the Buddhist tantric tradition (for instance, *sahajānanda*), and Nund Rishi's use of *Sahaja* as an adjective for Qur'ān receives the Islamic idiom into what for Nund Rishi was an ancient Kashmiri esoteric tradition.

*Sahaja* is a pre-classical term that appears in the *Bhagvadgīta* to mean 'inborn' or 'innate' but it became a critical term for esoteric Buddhism in early medieval North India.<sup>814</sup> This term had moved into Sufi, *bhaktī* and Sikh environments by the late medieval period. Ronald Davidson writes that *sahaja* "was a preclassical word that became employed in scholastic, particularly Yogacāra, literature as an adjective describing conditions natural, or less frequently, essential with respect to circumstances encountered in an embodied state."<sup>815</sup> Joseph T. O'Connell demonstrates that the meaning of *sahaja* as 'natural' persists as late as the sixteenth-century Caitanya

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<sup>814</sup> Ronald M. Davidson, "Reframing *Sahaja*: Genre, representation, ritual and lineage," in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30: 52-53. Kalidasa uses it in the sense of "innate" in *Raghuvamsha*. Ibid.

<sup>815</sup> Ibid., 46.

Vaishnavite tradition.<sup>816</sup> In his *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, Ronald Davidson quotes an early description of Sahajiyā Buddhism by Shashi Bhushan Dasgupta, which helps unpack some of the meanings of the term: "...its aim is to realize the ultimate innate nature (*sahaja*) or the self as well as of the dharmas, and it is Sahaja-yana also because of the fact that instead of suppressing and thereby inflicting undue strain on the human nature it makes man realize the truth in the most natural way, i.e., by adopting the path through which the human nature itself leads him."<sup>817</sup>

*Sahaja* has also been discussed in the context of Prakrit and Apabhramsha poetry, and it is not without significance that the term appears often in the medieval *dohā* tradition, to which both Lal Ded's *vākh* and Nund Rishi's *shruk* belong.<sup>818</sup> Per Kværne writes that *sahaja* "literally signifies "being born (-ja) together with (saha-)." <sup>819</sup> According to H V Guenther, *sahaja* means "'co-emergent' (it can be read as a noun or adjective) where emergence (ja) is a spontaneous and uncaused manifestation of what we might call the principle of 'complementarity' (saha)...A precise translation of the term would therefore have to be something like 'complementarity-in-spontaneity'..."<sup>820</sup> The term was abstracted from its ritual context in Buddhist tantra, and came to acquire new

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<sup>816</sup> Joseph T O'Connell, "Were Caitanya's Vaiṣṇavas really Sahajiyas? The case of Rāmānanda Rāya" in Tony K. Stewart, ed., *Shaping Bengali Worlds, Public and Private* (East Lansing, MI: Asian Studies Center, 1989), 12-13. The term had also acquired connotations of friendship in the Caitanya community. Ibid.

<sup>817</sup> Quoted in Ronald M. Davidson, "Reframing *Sahaja*: Genre, representation, ritual and lineage," 49.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>819</sup> Per Kværne, "On the concept of Sahaja in Indian Buddhist Tantric Literature," in *Temenos* Vo. 11 (1975): 88.

<sup>820</sup> Quoted in Ronald M. Davidson, "Reframing *Sahaja*: Genre, Representation, Ritual and Lineage," 50.

associations “precipitated by the Buddhist support of a discourse on naturalness as the *siñ qua non* of correct realization.”<sup>821</sup>

But most importantly, the term had appeared in an esoteric Buddhism in the context of socio-political fragmentation in early medieval India. The term gradually came to denote “an absolute level of reality or its cognitive component, nondual gnosis.”<sup>822</sup> As Davidson writes: “It would therefore appear that *sahaja* operated as a point of intersection between the caustic disapprobation of excessive ritualism ever in the background of the Buddhist subculture, the iconoclasm of vernacular literary expressions, and the peripatetic behavior of wandering siddhas, for whom physical yoga was a waste of time.”<sup>823</sup> Not only did *sahaja* mean ‘natural’ or ‘spontaneous’ but also ‘uncontrived.’ As Davidson writes, this is the spiritual path of least resistance.<sup>824</sup> Let us consider the following *shruk*:

*Yi swād vopal hākas tu’ hande*  
*Sōzan sahasas grande zāv*  
*Dḡd trāvith poni yus mande*  
*Su samsāras kande zāv*

The one who found taste in wild vegetables  
He is counted among the *Sahaja*  
The one who abandons milk for water  
He is born again into the world

Here Nund Rishi connects *sahaja* to a simple and ascetic lifestyle not indistinguishable from Prophet Muḥammad’s insistence on *faqr*, or voluntary poverty. The path to a spiritual transformation could be as simple as a turn away from the wealth of the world.

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<sup>821</sup> Ronald M. Davidson, “Reframing *Sahaja*: Genre, Representation, Ritual and Lineage,” in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30: 52.

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>823</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid.*

But the problem that remains, as Davidson puts in the context of Mahayana, is that if all “all humans are already possessed of human awakening, then is there nothing that actually needs to be done?”<sup>825</sup> But that which is innate is not easily accessible and this is why Nund Rishi speaks of the turn to *sahaja* as a rebirth.

It is quite clear that Nund Rishi identified the Qur’ān, and, therefore, Islam, with the *sahaja*. This was made possible by Islam’s self-representation as “innate” or “natural” religion, which became corrupted over time. Nund Rishi turned to the anti-ritualistic resonance of the term to articulate Sufi Islam in a Hindu-Buddhist environment. Hans Harder has argued that in pre-eighteenth-century Bengali Islamic writings, for instance, “Islamic religious ideas integrating yogico-tantric practices were the rule rather than the exception...”<sup>826</sup> Hans Harder further claims that the texts of pre-modern Bengali Islam show a striking affinity with mysticism of yogic/tantric descent and with popular strands of Buddhism.<sup>827</sup> But Nund Rishi also used the term *sahaja* as a way of translating the universalism of early Islam at a time when the Persian Sufis articulated a sophisticated Sufi metaphysics largely inaccessible to the local population. A more practical implication of the move was that it created space within the practice of Islam in Kashmir for forms of asceticism that had their origins in other religious traditions. *Sahaja* had been “a reference point for the siddhas’ criticism of Buddhist ritualism, scholastic involvement, and excessive yogic obsession, so that it occupied a soteriological, moral

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<sup>825</sup> Ibid.

<sup>826</sup> Hans Harder, *Sufism and Saint Veneration in Contemporary Bangladesh: The Maijbhandaris of Chittagong* (Routledge: New York, 2011), 325

<sup>827</sup> Hans Harder, *Sufism and Saint Veneration in Contemporary Bangladesh: The Maijbhandaris of Chittagong* (Routledge: New York, 2011), 325

high ground excluding the artificial.”<sup>828</sup> Nund Rishi, at one point, addresses Muslim ascetics as *siddhas*:

*Poz yod bozakh pants sh nomūrakh  
Natu' māz nomūrakh sōe che namāz  
Shivas tu' Shunyahas myul yod karakh  
Sido sōe che danthra namāz*

If you are true, you'll bend the five senses  
Or else you'll be bending your frame  
You must unite Shiva with the Nothing  
That Siddha is tantra namāz

Here Nund Rishi calls ascetic practices of exercising control over the senses as the true *namāz*, the Muslim prayer (*ṣalāh*).

Nund Rishi calls upon a Muslim to train in spiritual exercises lest his prayers are reduced to merely bending his body. The purpose of such spiritual exercises is to unite God with the Nothing. Here Nund Rishi not only hints at Kashmir's unique spiritual history, where Buddhism remained in dialogue with forms of Shaivism such as Kashmir Shaivism, but also alludes to a mystic experience he calls the *tantra namāz*, an idea that returns us to the liberation of *sahaja*. The *sahaja* Islam of Nund Rishi made the Kubrāwiyyā insistence on the *Sharī'ah* appear as empty scholasticism. It would be useful to remember that the Kashmiri tradition remembers Nund Rishi as *Sahajānanda*: the one who had tasted the ecstasy of *sahaja*. *Sahaja* as a condition is universal and Nund Rishi makes possible a discourse of a universal Islam not alien in an environment that is also of the *sahaja*. Does that make Nund Rishi a *Sahajiya* Muslim? Or a Muslim *Sahajiya*? We

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<sup>828</sup> Ibid., 73.

can settle these questions only after a more thorough understanding of the history of Buddhism and Buddhist thought in Kashmir.<sup>829</sup>

For Nund Rishi, *sahaja* is a path that opens Islamic spirituality to Kashmir's poor peasantry. The historians of medieval Kashmir inform us that Nund Rishi did not convert the local population to Islam. We can only conclude then that Nund Rishi translates Islam as one of the many *sahaja* paths to spiritual self-transformation in the Hindu-Buddhist environment of medieval Kashmir.<sup>830</sup> It is here that both Lal Ded and Nund Rishi come together as the possibility of a *sahaja vath* (*sahaja* path) which has elsewhere been called *bhaktī*.

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<sup>829</sup> Things are likely to become clearer if the concept of *sahaja* is also studied in the context of *Nāth-panthī yogis*.

<sup>830</sup> I use translation here in both the senses suggested by Ronit Ricci: "conveying a text of one language in another and in a wider, more flexible sense of striving for an 'equivalence' of meaning." See Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 33.

### *Conclusion*

The preceding chapters revealed Nund Rishi's poetic thinking as a form of negative theology. We explored the theme of death, the nothing, the apocalyptic and Islam as moments which interrupt a more conventional, kataphatic, impulse in Nund Rishi's mystical poetry. As we have seen, the negative theology of Nund Rishi not only challenged Islamic theology but also questioned the political structures of its time disclosing the political attitudes of Kashmir's new Muslim rulers. From Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj in Caliphate Baghdad to Sarmad in Mughal South Asia, Sufi poets often had to pay the ultimate price of life for divulging the secret of this proximity between positive theology and political power. It is, therefore, no coincidence that negative theology (in Kashmir and elsewhere) often emerged in moments of political crises. The emergence of negative theology in vernacular Sufi poetry in Kashmir, Punjab, Sindh and Bengal in South Asia also signals a shift in the very idea of Islam at a time when imperial power in these regions turned to political theology. The themes of death, the nothing, the apocalyptic or Islam in Nund Rishi's poetry, reveal a similar situation of crisis in medieval Kashmir over the question of the relations of the past to the present, and of the Hindus to the Muslims.

One of the more significant stakes of this dissertation is that this turn to an unknowable God made possible a conversation across religious traditions. This moment is often approached with the academic shorthand of Sufi-*bhaktī* movements. But the transitions, and translations, such an inter-religious conversation made possible also open out to a thinking of new universals. It is to be regretted that these movements have

largely been studied only in the framework of history of religions or literary studies, and not as significant milestones in the history of thought in South Asia. We can go so far as to say that the Sufis of South Asia achieve for Islam in the region what St. Paul achieved for Christianity: the universalization of its message of salvation. If this possibility appears around the figure of Kabir in one region, it bears the name of Nund Rishi in another. It is not entirely clear in what ways the ascetic is connected here to forms of an early Indian modernity.

Even though Nund Rishi calls for an ethical transformation of the self, he also demands nothing less than a political revolution. The pivot of Nund Rishi's asceticopolitical transformation is his reading of Islam as a form of negative theology. For Nund Rishi, Islam is not a stranger in South Asia because it is a stranger everywhere (recall the Prophetic *hadīth* in which Prophet Muhammad calls Islam a stranger).<sup>831</sup> He speaks of Muhammad and Uways in the same poem in which he speaks of Kashmiri Rishis. My point is that it is not merely the constitution of a moral subject but also of a political subject which is at stake in Nund Rishi's poetry. This is what makes reading Nund Rishi's mystical poetry an urgent task in a region which remains so strongly divided on questions of the political.

In the Muslim world, the battle over the meanings of Islam between political theology and poetic thinking is an old one. To be a Muslim poet in medieval Kashmir was to enter the realm of these contestations. Even though the form of these contestations

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<sup>831</sup> Prophet Muhammad said: "Islam began as a stranger and it will become a stranger, so blessed are those who are strangers." See Richard Kearney, "Imagining the Sacred Stranger: hostility or hospitality?" in *Politics and the Religious Imagination*, edited by John Dyck, Paul Rowe and Jens Zimmermann (New York: Routledge, 2010), 23.

have changed in the postcolonial period, the politics of reading mystical poetry, or Islam, must still negotiate these dichotomies. Nowhere are the stakes as evident as in Kashmir where mystical poetry interrupts political theology to reclaim Islam for an alternative thinking of the political. The tensions between claims of poetry and those of politics over Islam in South Asia go back to medieval times. In Nund Rishi's *shruks*, an alternative thinking of the political emerges which foregrounds questions of mortality, negation, temporality and faith.

Be it in the moment of vernacularization between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries (the time of Lal Ded and Nund Rishi) or the crisis of oppressive alien rule in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries (the time of poets like Samad Mir and Wahab Khar), mystical poetry has played a fundamental role in expressing Kashmiri concerns. But what is unique about Nund Rishi is that he not only anticipated the trajectory of the new Muslim society in Kashmir but also gave shape to it. Negative theology has an affinity to relationality and, in the case of Nund Rishi, it irrupts with a force to turn the moment of encounter between Kashmir and Islam into a political event that envisions a new, and inclusive, Kashmiri community (free from the control and power of the Brahmans criticized by Lal Ded and the *mullāhs* castigated by Nund Rishi, and above all, free of caste and race). It is of profound significance that the Kashmiris often invoke the names of Nund Rishi and Lal Ded together to the degree that there is an overlap between their corpuses. When Nund Rishi says *Kan thāv shrukÿen tu' panj sūran* (Pay attention to the *shruks* and the five Surahs) he clearly establishes not only a relation between poetry (*shruks*) and revelation (the five oft-recited Surahs) but urges reading the latter in the

light of the former. This centrality of poetry in public life has been a significant feature of South Asian Muslim societies and one of the key elements in the rise of an Indo-Muslim modernity (even an Indian modernity). It is not that we do not find a reified God in Nund Rishi's mystical poetry but that there is an unsaying of such reification. Nund Rishi is engaged in a struggle to reinterpret traditional Islamic understanding but that struggle never breaks out into open rebellion. This is perhaps why, even as he declares an allegiance to Maṣū̄r al-Ḥallā̄j, he denounces his disclosure of the 'secret.'

In chapters 2 and 3 that deal with the thinking of death and the nothing in Nund Rishi, we considered the negativity that makes possible an access to the existential structure of Nund Rishi's Islam. The apocalyptic, which is at the core of that existential structure, was explored in chapter 4. The way this distinctive thinking of Islam challenges normative ideas of Islam and Islamic Law (*Sharī'ah*) was discussed in chapter 5. There are other themes in Nund Rishi like the *nafs* (ego/self), *'ishq* (love), *'ilm* (knowledge) which were barely discussed in the chapters and deserve a separate treatment. I would like to stress at the end that any comprehensive study of Nund Rishi and the Rishi Order of Kashmiri Sufism must be even more interdisciplinary than this project and engage with the fields of South Asian Studies, Indology, Islamic Studies and postcolonial theory. Both Nund Rishi and Lal Ded are best read in the framework of a truly comparative mysticism. But even more significantly, the "ideal linguistic equipment", to borrow a phrase from Hans Harder, must include Sanskrit, Persian and Kashmiri. Perhaps this is the reason few detailed studies of Nund Rishi have been attempted despite his significance to the religious history of North India.

The scope of my dissertation has been unusually broad and can by no means be addressed in one study. I chose here to emphasize certain key themes that occur in the *shruks* of Nund Rishi in order to contribute to our understanding of the linguistic and cultural resources that not only inform Kashmiri pasts but also offer clues for a different future. I may have raised more questions here than I have answered. But it is in the hope that future research may offer a more complex and fuller picture of the intellectual and political legacy of this revered Kashmiri saint, popularly called the '*Alamdār*, or the flagbearer of Kashmir.

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