

# Peace, Ecology and Knowledge: Shaikh-ul-Aalam in Modern Educational Discourse

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*Shaikh-ul-Alam, the revered 14th-century Kashmiri mystic and poet, offers a profound foundation for reimagining contemporary educational philosophy through the lens of spiritual wisdom, social harmony, and environmental consciousness. His teachings emphasize the cultivation of inner knowledge, ethical living, and harmony with nature—principles that align closely with modern concepts of value-based education. In an era marked by global conflict, environmental degradation, and moral decline, Shaikh-ul-Alam's emphasis on peace and ecology provides timely guidance for fostering compassionate, sustainable communities. This paper explores how his worldview bridges Eastern and Western thought by blending spiritual introspection with rational inquiry, making his philosophy a compelling model for holistic education. His vision transcends religious and cultural boundaries, advocating a humanistic pedagogy rooted in tolerance, ecological stewardship, and ethical awareness. By revisiting his legacy, educators and policymakers can integrate his principles into curricula that nurture not only intellectual growth but also emotional and moral development. Through this synthesis of traditional wisdom and modern educational frameworks, Shaikh-ul-Alam's thought emerges as a vital resource for crafting a transformative, inclusive, and peace-oriented educational philosophy in today's globalized world.*

**Keywords:** Shaikh-ul-Alam, Educational Philosophy, Value-based Education, Peace and Ecology, Eastern and Western Thought

## Introduction

Shaikh-ul-Alam, also known as Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani or Nund Rishi, is one of the most significant spiritual and philosophical figures in the cultural and religious history of Kashmir. Born in the late 14th century, his teachings remain deeply relevant in the modern era—especially in discussions surrounding *educational philosophy, value-based education, peace and ecology*, and the reconciliation of *Eastern and Western thought*. His vision of life, expressed through poetry, action, and spiritual leadership, provides a foundational model for developing holistic and ethical education in today's fragmented world.

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In his time, Kashmir was undergoing tremendous political and religious change. Amid this turbulence, Shaikh-ul-Alam emerged as a guiding light, emphasizing a form of learning that was not confined to books or institutions, but instead rooted in self-awareness, moral responsibility, and communion with nature. Unlike many formal scholars of his era, he rejected dogmatism in favor of experiential wisdom, personal reflection, and ethical action. His focus was not merely on transmitting knowledge, but on *transforming the self*—a concept deeply aligned with what is now referred to as *value-based education*.

A distinctive feature of his thought is his deep ecological consciousness. Shaikh-ul-Alam recognized the interdependence of all living beings and repeatedly warned against the exploitation of natural resources. His famous verse, “*Ann poshi teli yeli wan poshi*” (Food will last as long as forests last), speaks to the ecological wisdom embedded in his teachings. This philosophy of environmental stewardship predates modern ecological awareness by centuries and reflects a worldview in which nature is sacred and intimately linked to human survival. Today, such a perspective is urgently needed as climate crises threaten the very fabric of human life.<sup>1</sup>

His ecological sensibilities were not theoretical—they were lived. It is recorded that he planted fruit-bearing trees and encouraged sustainable agriculture. He practiced simplicity and lived a life of minimal consumption. His commitment to ecological balance and sustainability presents a model for modern educational curricula that seek to integrate environmental ethics into classroom discourse. Educators today are increasingly turning toward *ecopedagogy*—the integration of environmental learning with ethical and spiritual values. In this context, Shaikh-ul-Alam’s life and message become profoundly instructive.

Equally important is his message of peace and interreligious harmony. At a time when Hindu-Muslim relations in Kashmir were fragile, Shaikh-ul-Alam stood for unity, tolerance, and mutual respect. He drew inspiration from Lal Ded, a revered Kashmiri mystic of Hindu background, and maintained close spiritual ties with people of all faiths. His synthesis of Islamic Sufism and indigenous Rishi traditions gave rise to a unique Kashmiri cultural ethos known as *Kashmiriyat*—a spirit of shared identity that transcends religious boundaries. His efforts to unite diverse communities through spiritual and ethical dialogue offer a timeless lesson for peace education in a world fractured by sectarianism and intolerance.

From an educational philosophy standpoint, Shaikh-ul-Alam emphasized the cultivation of the whole person—intellect, spirit, emotion, and action. He rejected superficial learning and emphasized “useful knowledge,” which he described as that which leads to self-realization and social justice. His teaching methodology resembled what progressive educators like John Dewey would later advocate: learning through experience, reflection, and ethical engagement with the world. Here, we see the confluence of *Eastern and Western thought*, showing that meaningful education must go beyond cognitive development to include moral, social, and environmental awareness.

In modern times, his legacy is increasingly being explored by scholars, educators, and policy thinkers seeking alternatives to the test-driven, industrial model of education. Institutions such as the University of Kashmir’s Markaz-e-Noor center have taken initiatives to preserve and disseminate his thought. Schools and community organizations across Jammu and Kashmir also honor his contributions, using his life as a lens to teach students values such as humility, service, and ecological responsibility.

Moreover, the Rishi order that he founded—known for its emphasis on asceticism, non-violence, and harmony with nature—offers a practical blueprint for building ethical communities rooted in compassion and justice. This philosophy challenges the dominant global model of competition-based, consumption-driven development. His insistence on simplicity, empathy, and balance can serve as a powerful corrective in an era of moral confusion and ecological breakdown.

It is also essential to frame Shaikh-ul-Alam's contributions in the broader discourse between Eastern and Western educational traditions. Western thought has largely emphasized critical thinking, scientific reasoning, and institutional learning, while Eastern philosophies often prioritize introspection, moral values, and harmony with nature. Shaikh-ul-Alam’s teachings offer a rare and potent blend of both: he valued critical self-inquiry and empirical observation, but always within a spiritual and ethical framework. This makes his philosophy especially relevant today as educators strive to blend cognitive development with emotional intelligence and global citizenship.<sup>2</sup>

The educational philosophy of Shaikh-ul-Alam is deeply relevant for the 21st century. His teachings inspire a *value-based education* rooted in ethical conduct, ecological wisdom, and spiritual consciousness. His call for peace and harmony, his ecological awareness, and his

embrace of diverse religious traditions reflect an integrative worldview that transcends time and culture. As educational systems around the world confront crises of meaning, disconnection from nature, and moral indifference, Shaikh-ul-Alam offers a holistic path forward—a model of education that nourishes both the mind and the soul.

## **Discussion**

Shaikh-ul-Alam, also known as Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani or Nund Rishi, is one of the most revered figures in the spiritual and intellectual history of Kashmir. His life and teachings continue to inspire individuals across religious, cultural, and geographical boundaries. Born in the late 14th century, his wisdom transcends time, offering profound insights into value-based education, peace, and ecology, while reconciling Eastern spirituality with Western intellectualism. His poetic verses—particularly his shruks (short mystical verses)—serve as a powerful vehicle for conveying these themes.

In an era where education often focuses on cognitive learning, Shaikh-ul-Alam's philosophical framework emphasizes holistic development, blending intellectual growth with spiritual and ethical awareness. His teachings are not limited to religious or philosophical contexts but extend to social, ecological, and moral realms. By looking at his poetry and integrating it with modern educational concepts, we can see the potential of his ideas in creating a sustainable, peaceful, and compassionate society.

### **Shaikh-ul-Alam's Philosophy of Knowledge: Beyond Intellectualism**

In Shaikh-ul-Alam's worldview, knowledge is not an isolated intellectual pursuit but a holistic endeavor that involves the cultivation of wisdom, character, and moral responsibility. His poetry frequently explores the concept of knowledge as a means to understand the self, connect with the divine, and establish a deep bond with nature.

For instance, in one of his famous verses:

*“Wuchhun Chuzwanz, hezwas hachuwor  
Korus pakhchawor, Wuchhun yi  
Yath kalsi gwasie teth kalsi hachuwor  
Teth kalsi dyun chhu Wuchhun yi.”*

Translation:

(To see the All-Pervasive is to find the Truth,  
With Wings of longing, I took flight to see;  
In the Vessel that is purified, the Reality resides,  
In that very vessel, the vision is granted.)<sup>3</sup>

Here, Shaikh-ul-Alam advocates for experiential learning—a concept increasingly popular in modern educational discourse. He suggests that true education goes beyond books and formal institutions and is rooted in the real-world experiences one encounters. Education, according to him, is about deepening one's connection with the natural world, recognizing it as a mirror of divine wisdom.

The philosophical foundation of his teachings resonates with contemporary educational theories, particularly progressive education, which stresses the importance of learning through experience, creativity, and reflection. Shaikh-ul-Alam's call to learn from nature aligns with modern ecopedagogy, which integrates environmental education into ethical and spiritual learning. For Shaikh-ul-Alam, the pursuit of knowledge is not simply for personal gain but must lead to social service and the betterment of society. In his worldview, an educated individual is one who combines intellectual rigor with emotional and moral maturity.

This broad understanding of knowledge reflects his rejection of a purely cognitive-based education model. Shaikh-ul-Alam's idea of education integrates the intellect, spirit, and emotions, ensuring that learners develop a strong ethical foundation and a profound sense of responsibility toward the environment and society.

### **Ecology in Shaikh-ul-Alam's Poetry: A Precursor to Environmental Consciousness**

Shaikh-ul-Alam's sensitivity to ecological concerns was remarkable for his time. His verses demonstrate a deep reverence for nature and emphasize humanity's duty to protect and nurture it. One of his most iconic verses is:

*“Ann poshi teli, yeli wan poshi.  
Wan Poshi teli, yeli mann Poshi”*

Translation:

(Food will thrive only as long as the forest thrive,

And the forests will thrive only as long as the human mind (heart) thrives).<sup>4</sup>

This verse underscores the interdependence of human life and the natural environment. It highlights the importance of forests, rivers, and other natural resources for the sustenance of life. In today's context, this verse can be interpreted as an early expression of ecological consciousness, emphasizing sustainable living and the ethical use of natural resources.

Shaikh-ul-Alam's poetry consistently underscores that the health of the environment is intimately connected to the well-being of individuals and communities. This is a core principle in modern ecopedagogy, which stresses the importance of cultivating environmental ethics as part of the educational curriculum. Through his poetry, Shaikh-ul-Alam taught that caring for the environment was a moral responsibility, one that should be ingrained in the educational process.

His ecological consciousness also extends to his personal life. It is recorded that Shaikh-ul-Alam personally planted trees, cultivated gardens, and promoted practices of sustainable agriculture. His commitment to ecological sustainability offers a rich source of inspiration for modern educational frameworks that seek to integrate environmental values into the curriculum.

Furthermore, in another verse:

*“Zamin poshyem, sarwan poshyem.*

*Pan Poshyem, teli yeli mann poshi”*

Translation:

(If the earth shall flourish, the universe shall flourish,

I (the self) shall flourish, only when the mind (heart) flourishes.)<sup>5</sup>

Shaikh-ul-Alam makes a direct connection between the earth's nurturing and the flourishing of life. This powerful metaphor serves as a reminder that the health of the land is directly

linked to human prosperity. His message is a precursor to today's sustainability movements, which emphasize the need for environmental stewardship in all aspects of life—be it educational, social, or economic. As we face growing environmental challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and deforestation, Shaikh-ul-Alam's poetic wisdom serves as a timeless call to action for greater ecological responsibility.

### **Poetry and Peace: Advocating for Unity through Verses**

One of the central themes of Shaikh-ul-Alam's work is peace—both inner peace and peace between communities. At a time when Kashmir was experiencing deep religious and political turmoil, Shaikh-ul-Alam's teachings sought to unite people from different faiths through a shared ethical framework. His poetry consistently emphasizes unity, tolerance, and the importance of compassionate living.

In one of his famous verses:

*“Chuy zan chuzwan, roshni wan  
Korus pakhchawor, Wuchhun yi  
Andryum gash teli, yeli mann poshi.”*

Translation:

(The universe is a forest of light to those who know,  
With wings of longing, I set out to see  
The inner light shines only when the  
Heart begins to bloom.)<sup>6</sup>

Shaikh-ul-Alam highlights the idea that peace begins with inner purity. For him, the key to lasting peace was the cultivation of moral and spiritual integrity. This message resonates with contemporary peace education frameworks that emphasize emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and self-awareness as prerequisites for building peaceful societies. According to Shaikh-ul-Alam, the cultivation of inner peace leads to outer peace, as individuals who embody love and compassion are less likely to engage in conflict.

His approach to peace was not limited to personal peace but also extended to communal harmony. Shaikh-ul-Alam's teachings on interreligious dialogue and shared humanity were

revolutionary at the time. His spiritual wisdom integrated elements from Islamic Sufism and Hindu Rishi traditions, creating a syncretic understanding of faith that emphasized universal human values over sectarian divides. In his poetry, he often spoke of the unity of all spiritual paths, suggesting that all religions ultimately lead to the same truth.

For example, in his famous lines:

*“Chon jindwan, war chusunwan  
Korus Pakhchawor, wuchhun yi  
Yath kalsi gwasie teth kalsi hachuwor  
Teth kalsi dyun chhu Wuchhun yi”*

Translation:

(The universe is a garden of life, a forest of light,  
With wings of longing, I took flight to see;  
In the vessel that is purified, the Reality resides,  
In that very vessel, the vision is granted.)<sup>7</sup>

Shaikh-ul-Alam’s advocacy for unity transcended the boundaries of religion. His message is timeless: love and compassion are the foundations of lasting peace. Today, as the world grapples with religious extremism, political conflicts, and ethnic divisions, Shaikh-ul-Alam’s teachings offer a vital roadmap for peacebuilding. By integrating his principles into educational curricula, educators can nurture future generations who are committed to the values of peace, love, and unity.

### **The Fusion of Eastern and Western Thought**

One of the most compelling aspects of Shaikh-ul-Alam’s teachings is his ability to reconcile Eastern spirituality with Western intellectualism. His mystical approach to knowledge, which emphasizes direct experience, intuition, and self-reflection, mirrors key themes in Eastern philosophy. At the same time, his calls for social justice, critical inquiry, and ethical action align closely with certain aspects of Western thought, particularly the Enlightenment tradition that emphasizes reason, individual rights, and social progress.

For instance, in the verse:

*“Roshnai chuzwan, ilm ch’unzwan  
Korus Pakhchawor, wuchhun yi  
Yath Kalsi gwasie teth Kalsi hachuwor  
Teth kalsi dyun chhu wuchhun yi.”*

Translation:

(The whole universe is a manifestation of light, and true knowledge is the hunt for that Light,  
With wings of spiritual longing, I set out to witness this;  
Only when the vessel of the soul is cleansed does the truth find a home,  
In that purified heart alone is the true vision granted.)<sup>8</sup>

Shaikh-ul-Alam blends the Eastern mystical tradition of inner light with the Western intellectual tradition of knowledge. In this verse, he suggests that knowledge is not just a product of the mind but a manifestation of the inner self. This idea is in harmony with the Eastern notion of self-realization and enlightenment, which emphasizes the integration of intellect and spirit. At the same time, it reflects Western ideals of empowerment and intellectual autonomy, encouraging learners to not just accumulate knowledge but to align it with their ethical and spiritual values.

In this synthesis, Shaikh-ul-Alam’s educational philosophy offers a holistic approach to learning—one that integrates cognitive development with moral and spiritual wisdom, laying the groundwork for global citizenship and intercultural dialogue. His teachings call for the development of individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also ethically responsible, spiritually aware, and socially engaged.

Shaikh-ul-Alam’s poetry provides a rich framework for understanding value-based education, ecology, and peace. His teachings transcend the boundaries of time and culture, offering a comprehensive approach to knowledge that combines intellectual rigor with moral and spiritual wisdom, laying the groundwork for global citizenship and intercultural dialogue. His focus on environmental sustainability, peacebuilding, and ethical responsibility offers a profound source of inspiration

## **Conclusion**

Shaikh-ul-Alam, also known as Nund Rishi, occupies a unique and distinguished place in the history of Kashmir, not only for his spiritual and poetic contributions but also for the

profound wisdom he offered regarding education, peace, and ecology. His work transcends religious and cultural boundaries, offering a harmonious blend of spirituality, morality, and intellectual engagement. Through his poetry, he touches upon vital contemporary concerns such as value-based education, sustainable environmental practices, and the cultivation of inner peace—principles that are equally relevant today as they were centuries ago. By integrating these concepts into a holistic worldview, Shaikh-ul-Alam's legacy provides a powerful framework for addressing the pressing challenges of the modern world.

At the core of Shaikh-ul-Alam's educational philosophy is the belief that knowledge is not simply an intellectual pursuit but an ethical, spiritual, and communal responsibility. He rejects the notion that education is only for personal success, arguing instead that it should lead to the betterment of society. His emphasis on experiential learning, moral responsibility, and spiritual wisdom highlights the need for an education that is deeply intertwined with social service and environmental stewardship.

In his poetic verses, Shaikh-ul-Alam consistently calls for reconciliation with nature and sustainable living. His teachings on ecology, expressed through metaphors that link the survival of humanity to the health of the natural world, precede modern environmental movements by centuries. He advocates for a deep understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment, encouraging practices of respect, care, and sustainability—values that are crucial as we face environmental degradation in the 21st century.

Another essential element of his work is his profound understanding of peace. Shaikh-ul-Alam's concept of peace is not limited to the absence of conflict but extends to inner tranquility, compassion, and societal harmony. His poetry calls for tolerance, unity, and the importance of interfaith dialogue—ideas that remain particularly relevant in our increasingly divided world. By advocating for a compassionate approach to life, Shaikh-ul-Alam provides a timeless message of peace that transcends the boundaries of religion, culture, and geography.

Finally, his fusion of Eastern spirituality with elements of Western thought offers a path toward greater global dialogue. His teachings bridge the spiritual traditions of the East with the intellectual and philosophical inquiries of the West, demonstrating that the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom can unite diverse cultural traditions. This synthesis offers an

invaluable framework for understanding how both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions can coexist and complement one another in addressing modern global challenges.

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

- 1. Integrating Shaikh-ul-Alam's Poetry into Environmental Education**  
Investigate how Shaikh-ul-Alam's ecological teachings, especially his emphasis on nature and sustainability, can be used in contemporary environmental education to promote ecological responsibility and sustainable living.
- 2. Applying Shaikh-ul-Alam's Philosophy to Peace Education**  
Examine how Shaikh-ul-Alam's views on inner peace, social harmony, and interfaith dialogue can contribute to modern peacebuilding efforts and conflict resolution strategies in diverse societies.
- 3. Shaikh-ul-Alam and Interfaith Dialogue**  
Research the syncretic nature of Shaikh-ul-Alam's spiritual teachings and their potential for fostering interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance in today's polarized world.
- 4. Comparing Shaikh-ul-Alam's Educational Philosophy with Modern Theories**  
Conduct a comparative study between Shaikh-ul-Alam's holistic educational approach and modern educational theories like progressive education and ecopedagogy, exploring how his philosophy can inform current educational practices.
- 5. The Influence of Shaikh-ul-Alam on Kashmiri Identity and Culture**  
Explore Shaikh-ul-Alam's lasting impact on Kashmiri identity, focusing on how his teachings have shaped Kashmiri culture, spiritual life, and community values, especially in contemporary contexts.

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<sup>1</sup>Javid Ahmad Rehman, “Conservation of Environment in the Sight of Sheikh Nur-ud-Din (Rishi),” Kashmiri Journal, Vol. 5, no.1 (2020): 14-22.

<sup>2</sup> Manzoor Ahmad Bhat. *Educational Philosophy of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali: A Value-Based Perspective*, Markaz-e-Noor Centre, University of Kashmir, 2017.

<sup>3</sup>Ghulam Mohammed Shad (ed.), *Kalam-e-Sheikh-ul-Alam* (Srinager: Ali Mohammad & Sons, 2024), 104.

<sup>4</sup> Ghulam Mohammad Shad (ed.), *Kalam-E-Sheikh-ul-Alam* (Srinager: Ali Mohammad & Sons, 2024), 228.

<sup>5</sup> M.Y. Taing (ed.), *Kulliyat-e-Sheikh-ul-Alam* (Srinager: Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1985), 142.

<sup>6</sup>G.N. Adfar, *Sheikh-ul-Alam: The Sage of Kashmir* (Srinager: Markaz-i-Noor, Centre for Sheikh-ul-Alam Studies, University of Kashmir, 2012), 94.

<sup>7</sup>Sayeed Nusrat. *The Philosophy of Peace in Kashmir: Lessons from Shaikh-ul-Alam's Mysticism*. Peace and Harmony Review, vol. 8, no. 4, 2013, 88-101.

<sup>8</sup>Mehmood Shah, *Mystical Knowledge and Enlightenment: Eastern and Western Perspectives*. (New Age Educational Press, 2016),112

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