



TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF WEALTH IN KASHMIR : A CASE STUDY OF HANDICRAFTS DURING 19TH AND FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

Mohd Iqbal Dar

Research student,
Department of History, Savitribai Phule Pune university, Pune.

Abstract:

In this paper the researcher will highlight the economic policy of the state with special reference to traditional sources of wealth with special reference to handicrafts during 19th and first half of the 20th century. Kashmir since ancient times has remained the self-sufficient economy and Land has been the dominant source of Kashmir economy. The Jammu and Kashmir being an agricultural state, where about 85% of the people lived in villages are engaged in agricultural, constitutes the backbone of entire structure of the state economy. Moreover, agricultural has a prominent role in the industrial development of the state. Besides agro-based economy, the Dogra period was also known for different industries and handicrafts. Silk industry, carpet making, paper mashie, wood carving, Gubha making etc. were some prominent industries. However, the shawl making was one of the renowned industries and the main source of the state. The credit of this industry lay in the production of the excellent and exquisite shawl for which Kashmir has always been famous in Europe and Asia.

KEY WORDS:

Dogra, Shawl, Namdha, Gubha, Silk, Pottery and wood work.

INTRODUCTION-

The fact that industrial revolution which changed the colour and fabric of European society had a tremendous impact on the economy of India as it led to the emergence of new economic relationship between Britain and India based on the *Doctrine of Free Trade* causing a decline to its traditional industries, the valley of Kashmir remained almost a closed economy up to the very end of the Dogra rule. This was so because the topography of the state acted as an impediment in the way of the economic integration of the state with the rest of the Indian sub-continent, protecting the traditional industries from the onslaught of British colonialism. It is equally important to underline the fact that owing to the lack of economic integration of the state with the neighbouring regions of the Indian sub-continent the state could not register any large scale industrial development, resulting in its overwhelming dependence on agricultural sector. Speaking in terms of modern industrial development, Kashmir was one of the least developed regions in the Indian subcontinent during the period of our study. Not only was the total industrial activity of a lower order but structurally also it was dominated by inefficient and low income generating household industries. The poor industrialization in this region was also due to the inhibiting factors like the lack of industrial raw material, backward transport and communication system, inadequate and irregular power supply. Nevertheless, like all medieval economies agriculture served as the backbone of the economy and the state

therefore was more concerned with the appropriation of land revenue than to diversify the revenue base. Although the traditional craft industry constituted the backbone of the main manufacturing sector, but this too was eroded on account of the introduction of machine made goods affecting some other important crafts of the valley as well. A brief mention of the major crafts of the period is given below:

Shawl Industry: The shawl manufacturing industry is said to be very oldest industry of Kashmir. But it was Zain-ul-Abdin who established it as a flourishing industry. Since then shawl began to be exported to India and abroad. During the Mughal period Kashmiri shawl had become so renowned that it was thought worthy of being described minutely both by AbulFazl and Bernier. It was an Afghan Governor Haji Karimdad khan who first established the department of Dagshawl and levied back-breaking taxes on this industry. Kashmiri shawls were of two kinds' loom and hand-made. In the handmade shawl, the workman was known as *Sadabaf*. He made the plain pashmine from the spun pashm in his own house which he bought himself directly from market. Upon this plain pashmine the coloured threads were afterwards worked with needles by a workman called *rufagar*. The *sadabafs* were under the complete control of the department called Dagshawl. When the Sikhs assumed power in 1819 the condition of this industry improved once again. Moorcraft who visited Kashmir in 1822 describes shawl industry to be in a flourishing state. He writes the whole value of shawl goods manufactured in Kashmir may be estimated at about 35 lacs of rupees. The value of shawl goods produced fell from Rs 64, 00, 000 in 1821 to 32, 00, 000 in 1836 and it recorded a further decline by the end of the sikh rule. The total value of shawl goods produced in 1846 was about Rs 25, 00, 000. However, with the accession of Maharaja Gulabsingh in 1846 shawl industry went from bad to worse. Like peasants the shawl weavers were also the victims of official tyranny. Economically the *shawlbafs* were the lowest-paid wage earners. The monthly income of a *shawlbaf* did not exceed 7 to 8 rupees, out of this earning he paid 5 rupees as tax, which left him with three or so to live on. Owing to this the shawl weavers resorted to strike in 1847 demanded the reduction of taxes such as *Baj* and *Nazarana* etc. The state had an income of Rs 7 lakhs per annum during 1846-69. The shawl trade received a fatal blow due to Franco-German war of 1870. It was a great calamity for the shawl weavers that on account of the heavy war indemnity, the French had no spare capital for the purchase of Kashmir shawls. In 1878 and 1879 a severe famine broke out in the valley. Lawrence writes that "in the city unfortunate shawl weavers were the chief victims of the famine".

During the reign of Maharaja Gulab Singh there were 27,000 weavers working at 11,000 looms. Pandit Raj Kak Dhar had the shawl tax in farm. He was to recover and pay to the state twelve of *chilki* rupees. The weavers had to pay 48 *chilkies* each. They were kept in charge of *Karkhandars* and none could change one Karkhandar for another. The Karkhandar managed to keep him not only under bondage through a Government decree, but he made his grip on him tighter by keeping him under perpetual debt through advancing small loans to be recovered from his wages. Over and above was the *Niliv* or forcible sale of Government grain to the weavers at the rates higher than those prevailing in the market.

GUBHAS (carpets): The production of *Gubhas* is an example as to how people can make the best uses of their limited resources. Besides it speaks about the people, who do not allow anything to go waste until its last has been achieved. *Gubhas* are prepared out of the old and worn out blankets. The *Gabah* industry was localized at Anantnag, whereas printed *Gabhas* were manufactured at Baramula. It created a new class of traders known as *Zachagarus*, who moved from place to place and collected old and worn out blankets or woollen *chadders*. They sold them to the *Gabah* manufactures. The pre-war period estimates a total production of *Gabhas* at Rs 50,000 whereas the war of 1914-18 raised this value to Rs 3 lakh. This industry employed about 1000 persons and the wage per head per day was 12 annas. According to the then director of industries the total capital invested in the *Gabah* Industry in 1925 was Rs, 1, 75,000. It is estimated that it afforded employment to about 400 families excluding the millers and middlemen. It remained a dominant industry of Anantnag area in Kashmir. Being on the road to Martand and to the sacred cave of Amaranth, thousands of visitors and pilgrims pass through the place every year. They were large purchasers of *Gubhas*, which kept the business not only alive, but in a flourishing condition and the manufacturers had their hands full.

NAMDHAH: Next to *Gubha*, there is another cheap floor covering available in the valley i.e., *Namdhas*. The *Namdha* in the beginning was imported from Chinese Turkistan unembroidered, though that of an inferior kind was felted at Srinagar. The plain *Namdha* then undergoes a set of process-dyeing, designing, embroidering, washing and finally balling before it was ready for export. It was in 1918, that the manufacture of *Namdhas* was taken up for the first time at Nawab-Bazar, Srinagar, by a well known firm namely Khawaja Garib Shah Ahad Bhat. Subsequently two well organized commercial establishments, Achemby trading corporation and Modern Pelt Company came into being. These factories quickened the

pace of *Namdha* trade by exporting them to foreign countries and to some Indian states. Due to the closure of the Leh Road during World War II the *Namdhas* came to be manufactured in a great quantity by the artisans on the scale of cottage industry. Their demand increased enormously in foreign countries especially in U.S.A. As a result many people, untrained in the art, started the production of *Namdha* rugs. This led to the deterioration in quality, which led to the fall of prices. But the *Achemby* trading corporation and *Modern pelt* company however maintained their quality and standards and by 1947 were transacting business worth of 25 lakh a month.

SILK Industry: The silk industry of Kashmir has been of an ancient standing. Abundance of mulberry trees in Kashmir afforded facilities for rearing silkworms. *Mirza Haider Dughlat* (1540-50) found the sericulture already developed in Kashmir. It was a state monopoly during the Mughal period and continued to flourish when *Hajee Karim Dad Khan*, the Pathan Governor of Kashmir (1776-83), suddenly levied a contribution of 40,000 on the silk growers. This act of extortion of Governor soon made this industry unprofitable and silk rearing was abandoned in most villages. Thus the industry in the early phase of the sikh rule was on the decline, and it was confined to 15 to 16 cottages only. The rent paid to the government by this industry in 1822 was Rs 300. This amount was doubled in 1823 and the rental earned Rs 400 at the cost of the workers, who were paid very little. The best silk was raised in the *parganaha kotihar* (presently *Shangus* block of District *Anantnag*). *Mian Singh* (1835-41) organized this industry and put it on sound footings. The income of Rs 300 to the State in 1823 was increased to Rs 22,000 in 1846. In 1901, 20 maunds of silk-worm eggs were used, which produced some 12,700 maunds of cocoons, roughly valued at Rs 8 to 10 lakhs. According to the census reports of 1911 and 1921 the silk factories of both *Srinagar* and *Jammu* provided direct whole-time employment to about 2500 persons. The silk industry brought to the state a revenue of Rs 385188 in 1901-02 and Rs 2296529 in 1925-26.

PAPIER-MACHE: Among other best known traditional crafts of Kashmir *Papier-Mâché* was also introduced in Kashmir by *Zainulabidin* who imported experts from *Samarkand* to train the local people. It was not only one of the best specimens of Kashmir art and one which attracted all lovers of art and colour but also the choicest in India and inferior only to the very best Persian.

This work was also known as *Kar-i-Qalamdani* as the best specimen of old work were the pen boxes (*qalamdani*). During the last two decades of the 19th century a variety of articles such as tables, tea-pots, trays, screens, picture frames and candle stands were made in order to create taste among the people. Besides, the upper classes called in the *Naqash* to decorate the ceiling walls of their houses and palanquins. In the beginning of the 20th century there was a large decline in the demand of its products, owing to the import of cheap machine made goods from India on one hand and on the other the shortage of paper pulp which supplied the main raw material for this industry. Thirdly the outbreak of world-war 1st (1914-1918) resulting in fall in demand for *papier-mâché* goods caused a great distress among the artisans. Consequently, a large number of workers were unemployed.

POTTERY WORK: It was one of the most important industries of Kashmir. The items manufactured were kitchen pots of various forms styles and sizes. The large size receptacles for the purpose of storing grains, wine and cylindrical pots, required for bee keeping were also made. Moreover, inner parts of the *kangri* (*kundal*) were also made of clay and some of the items were glazed. Generally pots were made of fine clay. In *Srinagar* the best and most durable pottery was manufactured at *Rainawari*.

WOOD WORK: Wood work had been introduced in Kashmir by sultan *Zain-ul-Abidin*. It appears that the wood-carving industry flourished during the Muslim rule in Kashmir. The wood work of Muslim period bears an eloquent proof to the fact that this art received a great stimulus under the sultans of Kashmir. All the old Hindu monuments in Kashmir are of stone, while the mosques of medieval period are mostly of wood. Some of the important religious places of *Srinagar*, such as *Naqeshband Shaib shrine*, *Khanqahi-Mulla* and *Mukhdum Shaib* shrine are the best models of the wood work in Kashmir.

The industry employed hundreds of workers in wood work and wood carving. *Fateh Kadal*, *Zana-Kadal*, *Safa Kadal* and *Rainawari* were the centres where one could find beautiful specimens of wood carving and wood work. According to the Report on the Economic Survey of the wood carving industry in Kashmir, the name of *Ustad* sultan *Muhammad Buda* will always be remembered. The Report says, that *Buda* went out of Kashmir and when he returned home he opened a workshop of carving. He engaged the services of craftsmen and paid them adequate remuneration. After sometime some of the craftsman withdrew from his workshop and set up their own independent concerns. The industry received a fillip during the period under review. According to the census of 1921, *Srinagar* possessed about 50 factories of wood-work. Namely 1) carving, mostly of walnut wood. 2) pinjara or lattice work. 3) Panelling in various

designs. There were about fifty factories engaged in the work.

Genesis Of Decline: On account of the oppression and atrocities committed by the 18th and 19th century rulers of Kashmir, there was wide spread uneasiness in the valley, Beginning with the Afghan regime, this situation continued uninterruptedly, escalating over a wider canvas of Kashmir history to cause enormous dejection among workmen preventing them from showing any enthusiasm in the manufacturing activity. The insecure highways, causing plunder of goods on the way from Kashmir to India too discouraged merchants to carry shawl loads from the valley. Dishonesty of Kabul merchants further stifled them. Being detrimental to the development of productive forces, these stifling circumstances created havoc and great economic depression resulting in considerable reduction in the number of shawl looms and other significant arts and crafts.

Heavy Taxation: The heavy taxation policy of the 18th and 19th century rulers discouraged the industry greatly, tolling the death knell of trade and commerce and making artisans starve for want of basic necessities. By making exorbitant demands of tribute on Kashmir, the Kabul Government paved the way for an oppressive system of taxation manifesting in the shape of imposts like *Zari-Niaz* (presentation tax), *Zari-Ashkhas* (income tax), *Rasum-i-Hirfagaran* (tax on craftsmen) and *Dag-i-shal*.

The Sikh rulers too exacted from shawlbafts as much as they could. By creating the special office of *kharidar* at Amritsar, they not only strengthened the *Dag-shawl*, but also collected an additional tax on shawls and thus obtained much larger revenue from the industry than was realized from the land. On each shawl the tax amounted to 26 percent of the estimated value. The *pashm* too was not free from tax.

Government Monopoly: The trade was also affected by the monopoly right exercised over it by the rulers of the 18th and 19th century. Besides, sending shawls as tribute to Kabul, the Afghan Governors indulged in their export trade. The Sikhs and the Dogras too exercised the monopolistic control over the shawl trade which directly operated in impoverishing the industry. From 1819 to 1846, the Sikh Government collected huge amount of money by levying exorbitant duties on shawl trade. The import of *pashm* was subjected to innumerable duties at various places between Ladakh and Tibet. On each horse-load comprising 70 seers, Rs 33 were charged on transport, where as duties amounted to Rs 95.

Migration of Shawal weavers: Another factor responsible for the decline of the shawal industry was the migration of *shawlbaf*s to the plains of Punjab, which was a direct consequence of the oppression, the heavy taxation and the monopolistic control discussed earlier. Natural calamities like floods, fires, famines and earthquakes also brought untold tribulations to artisans driving them to Punjab and other places in great numbers. All contemporary records and travelogues indicate unambiguously that the shawl weavers began slipping out of the country on account of the heavy oppression and the exorbitant taxes imposed on them from Afghan period onwards.

Competition from France: The French too made attempts to produce inexpensive copies of Kashmir shawls, for this they got full encouragement from their government. This is supported by the fact that Napoleon Bonaparte imported special goats from Central Asia to cultivate their breed in France. The failure of this attempt, which was largely due to climatic condition, however resulted in inducing the French industrialists to send their merchants to Kashmir to buy inferior shawls. By ripping up these shawls, the French obtained *pashm* out of which they made best shawls with the help of advanced production techniques. Change of Fashions: Ever increasing foreign competition stimulated by the intensification or revolution in industry that occurred in Europe during the late 18th and the early 19th century not only caused a considerable fall in the prices of machine made goods but also changed the entire concept of fashion making the handmade shawl of Kashmir entirely unfashionable. As a consequence demand for it from fashionable circles disappeared.

CONCLUSION:

The handicrafts industry occupied an important place in the economy of princely state of jammu and kashmir. It was basically a cottage industry and provided direct and gainful employment in future. The handicraft products have won world wide acclaim for their exquisite designs craftsmanship and functional utility. The woollen and silken carpets of the state remain unparalleled on the national scene for quality and design. The crewel embroidered *pashmina* and embroidered *Raffal Shawls*, pattern of *Kani Shawls*, intricate *Wood Carving*, production of *flora design in Paper- Machie goods* etc are some of the world famous traditional crafts of the state. In fact the kashmiri craftsman possessing a unique talent for intricate

workmanship was one of our most important resources. As an export-oriented industry, it has contributed considerably towards foreign exchange earnings worth crores of rupees annually. But this industry got declined due to certain factors such as Heavy taxation, Government monopoly, migration of shawl weavers and competition from France and change of fashions

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