

# Socio-cultural impact of Mughal rule on Kashmir

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**Abstract:** The Mughal conquest was a turning point in the social, economic, political, and cultural history of Kashmir. The *Subah* entered into a new phase of its history, in the first quarter of 14<sup>th</sup> century had paved the way for the Islamic institutions. Period that it took a definite shape there was substantial change in the working of the political and administrative institutions, and the socio-economic set-up did undergo a drastic change. The cash nexus was introduced during the period which gave a new fillip to the traditional economic set-up. Persian language which had already found its way into the *Subah* laminated Sanskrit and Sharda script completely.

It was during the period that the Kashmiri merchants, soldiers, poets, artisans and scholars served outside the Kashmir. They spread almost all over India while Irans, Turains, Afghans, and Indians came Kashmir and settled in the *Subah*. Obviously, this social mobilization gave a new turn to the existing social order.

**Key Words:** Subah, Jagirdars, shrines, thatched, shali, roganjosh, chilies, purdah, Khanqah, moulvi, nouroz, gompas, berari and kokar.

## Introduction:

The adjacent chieftains of little and great Tibet, PUNCH and other hill states were reduced to completely submission. A uniform Administrative set-up resulted in the free movement of merchants from one region to other. The *Jagirdars* besides the provincial officials mostly lived in the cities and towns. Thus these urban centers became the hub of the socio-cultural activities. New township developed on the trade routes. Srinagar had the privilege of being the capital of the *Subah* and as such it became the main center of all the social movements. The industrial growth took a different shape and in the course of the time the Shawl-weaving became a leading industry which revolutionized the economy of the *Subah*. These current and cross-current action and interaction ultimately resulted in the assimilation of diverse cultures and a new social set-up emerged out. However links with the past were not broken altogether but a new social order had taken birth from the debris of the old indigenous traditions. Dress, diet, housing, customs, and mode of living did undergo a change in the period followed.

## Housing:

Kashmir has always been praised for its lofty trees, no wonder that four, five and six storeyed buildings were built in wood. The ground floor was reserved for cattle, first floor was meant as family apartment, second and third floor were reserved for household chattels. The houses are made of unburnt bricks set in wooden frames, and of timber of cedar, pine, and fir, the roof being pointed to throw off snow. In the loft formed by the roof wood and grass are stored, and the ends are left open to allow these to be thrown out when fire occurs. The thatch is usually of straw. Rice straw is considered to be the best material, but in the vicinity of the lakes reeds also used. Near the forests the roofs are made of wooden shingles and the houses are real log huts, the walls being formed of whole logs laid one upon another. Sometime in the villages one finds the roofs of the large houses and of the *shrines* made of birch bark with a layer of earth above it. This forms an excellent roof, and in the spring the housetops are covered with iris, purple, white and yellow with the red Turk's head and the crown imperial lilies. Stone, lime, and backed bricks constituted the main building material used by the upper classes. The custom of enclosures was not in vogue but in the course of the time the habit developed and mud walls were built around the compounds. Wine yards, and ivy bales with plane and poplars was the peculiarity of their mansion. Their houses were mainly built on the bank of the Jhelum and Dal lake. The exteriors of these mansions were highly decorated, but the interiors were not equally beautiful. Lattice work was artistically introduced in place glass-panes. Most of them owned house-boats and *Shikaras*.

The free use of timber in the construction of the houses was responsible for the frequent conflagration in the cities and towns which reduced them to ashes. Jahangir was a witness to one of these calamities when a whole quarter of Srinagar was destroyed by fire.

The layout of the city of Srinagar was excellently beautiful. It was spread over on the both banks of the river Jhelum. Interior were linked by canals presenting a picturesque look. The city was densely populated and houses were built close to each other on either side of the streets. The lanes though paved with hewn stones, were yet very narrow, and the city was congested. Baramulla and Islamabad were two other towns spread over the same river.

## Village Life:

Kashmiri village is beautiful in spite of itself. It is a rich in its natural surroundings. With a clear, rumbling or quietly stream, a grove of trees and a refreshing panorama, most of the villages in the valley are object of great attraction. Village homes

are mostly built of mud bricks set in wooden frame. They make the four walls which are covered with timber. The slanting roof thatched over with rice straw does not allow the snow to collect. Such huts have been the mansions of the peasantry who formed more than 90 percent of the population. Generally they are two storeyed. The ground floor serves the purposeful a pen for sheep and cattle as well as a warm-room (*Hamam*) for the family during winter

Looking at it from modern standard of life an average villager's worldly possession was almost valueless. A few earthen pots, a wooden pestle and mortar for husking *Shali* some earthen jars for storing rice and pulses, a few mats, a creel to carry load, and a woollen blanket to cover the body day and night was all that belonged to a mud-hut villager. But even with these bare necessities of life the Kashmiri villager was perhaps the most contented person. Kashmiri did not use cots or bedsteads. In fact they do not need them. Yet their Punjabi neighbours hurled ridicule and sarcasm upon them. But their constant companion has been the famous portable brazier (*Kangar*) they cannot afford to part with during winter. The use of *kangar* evoked fantastic notion among the visitors to Kashmir which manifest sheer ignorance of local conditions.

On the whole, social life in the village remained stereotyped and immobile. The villagers were given no opportunity to alter their ancestral occupation of tilling, cultivating and rearing cattle. They continued to be treated like primitive serfs like their ancestors. They had no say in the administration, local or central, and nobody bothered about them. Yet they remained a happy, contented lot whatever they spared by their ubiquitous boggy-early snowfall and heavy rains in spring and autumn.

### Dress:

There was no uniformity in the dress among the various social and religious groups of people. But the dress of the masses on the whole changed little. The climatic conditions have a direct relation with the dress of the people. The cultivation of the cotton was not profitable because of poor yield while as excellent pastoral areas provided sufficient grazing ground for sheep so wool was available in large quantities. Secondly the valley and Kishtawar were full of mulberry trees. Silk worms were reared on the leaves of this golden tree. So, the dress of the men and women was prepared from wool. While silk garments were the privilege of the upper class people only.<sup>13</sup> Abul Fazl, "says that the apparel of masses was generally a woollen coat (*phiran or pirahan*) which would last several years." Jahangir also found the same stuff in use. He sarcastically that 'in wearing the *pattu* tunic (*kurta*) they believed that the air would affect them otherwise, and it would be impossible to digest their food without it.' He seems to have forgotten that Kashmiri had scarcity of cotton cloth but abundance of biting cold. In fact, a Kashmiri cannot digest food without his *kangar* close to his stomach and his woollen cloak about him during severe winter months. The headgear varied from place to place. Both Hindus and Muslims shaved their head, but they wore a beared. Turban was a common headgear but common people usually put on a skull-shaped cap. The use of turbans (*dastars*) was introduced by Muslims. There was no common use of trousers. It was used occasionally.

Women folk dressed their hair in plaits and a long clout of dyed wool was attached to the locks of hair, and put on an ornamented head dress called *qaasaba*, while the elder Hindu ladies tied a white handkerchief around their head. Nose ring was used by the women of Rajouri, Baramulla and Noushahra. Aurangzeb was annoyed to see women moving about without drawers, when he visited Kashmir in 1663. He directed Inayat Ullah Khan, the governor, to compel them to wear drawers to cover their naked legs. But while even Punjabi Hindu women invariably used the Muslim drawers (*izar or shalwar*), no women in Kashmir, Hindu or Muslim, excluding the rich, adopt this style of dress until quite recent time. Shoes made from hides were not used by the common people. It was a luxury from them. They used *pulhore*, a typical type of footwear made from twisted rice straw. Wooden sandals were commonly used.

Even after the wholesale establishment of Islam, a Kashmiri, Hindu or Muslim, could not be distinguished in his time by Jahangir, because both of them used the same style of dress. The change in the dress, etc. which later on distinguished a Pandit from a Muslim were, in all likelihood, introduced since the reign of Shah Jahan.

### Food:

A country overflowing with fish, fowl, sheep and juicy fruits like grapes, pomegranates, apples, pears, etc. on the one hand and cold invigorating climate on other has a natural tendency to develop taste for drinking and eating rich food. Though the rice is staple food, even poor man's meals in Srinagar consisted of ghee, milk, meat, vegetables, wine, pickles and vinegar. People in Srinagar do not drink the river water. For drinking purposes they used the Dal Lake water which was clean, light and digestible. According to Jahangir, they did not eat warm rice, but cooked it thoroughly till it absorbed all water, and then ate it cold. Neither salt nor ghee was added during preparation. But the people of upper class enjoyed all sorts of delicious dishes of various types and various preparations of meat were also cherished on festive occasions. Both boiled and fried green and dried vegetables were used commonly. Walnut oil was mostly taken by the poorer sections of the society. Rape, linseed, sesame and mustard oil was in common use. Butter and fats were not used commonly for preparations of the dishes as it was considered to be harmful because of cold climate. Water chestnut flour was staple food of thousands of people.

Fruits also formed a regular article of diet. Fruits which do not due to difficulty of transport seem to have been exported till the time of the Mughals, was hence available in abundance. Firishta records that the owner of a garden and the man who had no garden were all alike, for the garden had no walls, and no one was prevented from plucking the fruits. "Savoury cakes" were

served in feast, as also milk and curds. The staple food during Mughal period was rice, fish, and various vegetables, “though *Shali* rice is plentiful.. Mulberry was cultivated for feeding the silk cocoons and so its fruits were not eaten.

The Mughals were epicurean by temperament and were given to the pleasure of the table. They introduced their choicest cuisine and the Kashmiri cook learnt the preparation of *Goshtaba*, *Kabab*, and *Roganjosh*. Spices of various kinds like pepper, turmeric, ginger, cloves, chillies and saffron were added to increase the taste and flavor of the dishes.

#### Status of women:

Women enjoyed the same position in the society as was accorded to them in Persia, Turkistan and the rest of Mughal India. The ladies of the upper strata of the society enjoyed the privilege of an aristocratic society while the women folk in general faced the hard life side by side with their husbands. They worked in the fields, gardens and earned their livelihood from wool spinning. They did not observe *purdah* and move freely in the streets. They participated in the festivals and fairs. While the ladies of aristocracy and the *Ulama* maintained strict *purdah* and did not go out except in palanquins and litters. They received elementary education from tutors within their own houses. Some of the ladies of *Sufis* even managed the *Khanqah* after the death of their husband. Begam of Khwaja Moinuddin after the death of Khwaja in 1085/H managed the *Khanqah* and surpassed even men in its administration. It was a Sufic belief that women could not sustain the hardships required for emancipation and achieve perfection as *sufi*, but Mullah Shah Badakhshi had some women disciples also. Roopa Bhawani was also a saint and a Sufi of her time. She was a disciple of Shah Sadiq Qalander. However, the common women had neither leisure nor the facilities to receive education.

Though Islam has permitted polygamy, but it did not gain currency in the *Subah*. It was not practiced by the common people. Even the *zamindars* who were financially better off did not usually marry more than one wife. But polyandry was quite common custom among the Buddhists of Ladakh and Askardu. The conditions of women-folk of the valley was comparatively better than those of Ladakh and other hilly regions.

In Rajouri and Bimber inter-marriages among Hindus and Muslims were quite common. It is very strange to note that in a number of cases, Muslim ladies were buried alive with their husbands after the latter's death. Sati among Hindus was also quite common in these regions. Both Jahangir and Shah Jahan discouraged the inter-marriages and strictly forbade the sati. In spite of all restrictions, it continued until Aurangzeb's accession. He strictly prohibited the practice and warned the officials to face dire consequences if sati was resorted to with their connivance or failure. Child marriage was a common feature in the both communities in all regions of the *Subah*. Widows had no social restriction to remarry and they were entitled to own property.

Kashmiri beauty had always been proverbial. Fair-complexioned girls with striking and sharp features and a pointed nose had made the 17<sup>th</sup> century European travelers spell bound as they overwhelmed the valley. George Forster expressed the same opinion about the women-folk of the *Subah*. But the majority of the common people womenfolk who were exposed to the sun and the heat were not so charming in looks and were of pink complexion. The Mughal nobles had a great desire to marry Kashmiri girls. During the Mughal rule so many Kashmiri girls were married to them and many maidens of superb beauty were appointed as maids in the imperial household with various assignments and duties.

It was during this period that the women of Kashmir were exposed to the outer world and in the course of time resulted in the shameful and nefarious practices of trafficking in women and white slave trade.

#### Education and marriage:

The attitude of mind towards education among the population was basically secular. Education of children received particular attention. Both boys and girls acquainted from tender age with the basic principles and formalities of their religion by their parents. When they were entrusted to the care of the *maulavi* in the *maktab* or of the *pandit* in the *parthshala*, the inauguration ceremony was done under picturesque rituals. While Muslim boys and girls were taught the *kalmia* and the *namaz*, the Hindus were taught *sandhya* and *natinama*. Higher education too was imparted. Both Hindus and Muslims favoured early marriage for boys and girls. Perhaps Akbar's marriage regulation, fixing the minimum age limit of 16 for boys and 14 for girls, was not honored in Kashmir. On the whole marriage of boys and girls was a family matter rather than choice of the couple. It was an imposition whose consequences often proved to be tragic. Laleshwari (14<sup>th</sup> century) and Habba Khatun (16<sup>th</sup> century) were married to idiots who were no matchless for their talents and accomplishments. Their married life became disastrous.

The formalities observed for the consummation of marriage were common among the Hindus and Muslims. The Kashmiri Pandits also performed a sort of *nikka* (marriage contract) ceremony before the marriage was consummated. Some semblances of it are still in vogue, and they name this contract. *Lagana Chirika*.

#### Matrimonial Alliances:

It was a marked feature of medieval society that the weaker chieftains gave their daughters in marriage to the powerful ones who obviously happened to be their overlord or suzerain. The chieftains of Jammu, Rajouri, Poonch, and Little and Greater Tibet entered into such alliances even before the establishment of the Sultanate. The same tradition was kept up by the Muslims Sultans.

Mughal monarch in general and Akbar and his successors in particular attached inordinate emphasis to matrimonial alliances. Many Rajput chieftains offered their girls in marriage to the Mughal Emperors and princes. The same policy was followed in Kashmir. Even before the formal annexation, the daughter of Hasan Chak was married to Prince Salim. After the conquest many more princesses found their way into the imperial harem. It was not the ruling dynasty of Chaks but the chieftains of Tibet, Rajouri, and Kishtawar were also persuaded to enter into matrimonial relationship. Even the powerful nobles were persuaded to give their daughters to the princes of royal blood. Such alliances had far-reaching consequences, the rebel chieftains were pacified and befriended to obey the Mughal Emperors, and relinquished armed struggles against the Mughals. It thus proved a master stroke of imperial policy of winning friends and disarming opposition. Information is lacking as to what role these ladies played in the imperial harems, and how far they were able to affect the imperial policies. **Amusement and Recreation:**

Whenever people found relief from internal disorder, they exhibited extraordinary sense of repose and joy in their social activities. They took great interest in out-door amusements like wrestling, fishing, cock fighting, ram fighting, bird catching, hawk-fighting, pigeon flying, horse riding and archery. *Jashn* (convivial party) was the most popular form of social entertainment among the nobility. Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan also organized *Jashns* on the Takht-i-rawans (river palaces) and in the charming Shalimar, Verinag and Achabal gardens. Even the poor had their own *Jashns*. They held *bandapathrs* (indigenous theatrical shows) and drinking parties in the gardens and on boats. The hunting of wild ducks and fowls was common hobby. The bird catchers delighted in taking their boats in the midst of the lake along with their highly trained falcons. The falcon was left free and it pounced upon its prey in the midst of air and brought down in water. The fowls that were caught were cooked and served among the friends. Polo or Choughan was a common game played almost throughout the *Subah* by all section of people. It was equally popular in Tibet and Kishtawar. It is interesting to note that mock battles were fought among the youngsters of different wards of Srinagar in Maisuma ground. Tipcart and hopscotch were some other games played during Mughal period.

#### **Festivals:**

Though the Hindus were numerically very insignificant, nevertheless, some of their festivals were observed by their Muslim brethren also with great éclat. The festivals generally synchronized with the season of comparative leisure from out-door activities like tilling and harvesting. Most among Hindu festivals were the *Shivaratri*, *VyathTruwah*, *Gadabatha*, *Khichri*, *Amavas*, *Dussehra*, *Nagyatra* and *Ganachakra*. Kashmiri never missed a chance to participate in a festive occasion. Both religious and secular type festivals were observed and enjoyed by all the sections of the people. Akbar celebrated the *diwali* in Kashmir when the boats, the river banks and the roofs of the houses were illuminated with lamps all presenting a splendid appearance. Jahangir took keen interest in the celebration of the *VyathTruwah* and *Dussehra* in Kashmir.

*I'd*, *Subah-i-Barath*, and *Nouroze* were observed with great rejoicing pomp, and show. All sections of society participated in these festivals. *Nouroze*, *Diwali* and *Ids* had become virtually the national holidays. Bonfires, illuminations and *Jashns* were surpassing even the excellence of Persian style. A legendary birth day of the river Jhelum on 13<sup>th</sup> of Bhadun was celebrated by illuminating tinny oil lamps, on the both the banks of river Jhelum. Beside these national festive occasions, some regional and local religious festivals were also celebrated. The death or birth anniversary of saints and Sufis, who were scattered all over the *Subah*, were celebrated with reverence. The annual fairs *Urs* of the saints like Sheikh Noorud-Din Rishi at Charari Sharif, Baba Janbaz Wali at Baramulla, Rishi Maloo at Islamabad. Sayyid Ali Hamadani and Sheikh Hamza Makhdoomi at Srinagar were also held with great reverence and adherence. Hindu also celebrated the annual fairs of Tulla Mulla, Amar Nath, Sind Berari and Kokar Nag. Similarly the annual function of Shah Asrar-ud-Din at Kishtawar and periodical festivals in various gompas in Ladakh were also celebrated with great reverence.

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