



Kashmir Shawl: Industry, Trade And The State In A Historical Perspective (1600-1750 C.E.)

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Abstract

The shawl industry in Kashmir is of remote antiquity. The industry was mainly dependent on the wool (pashm) chiefly imported from Ladakh and also from other surrounding regions. It was unrivalled for its peculiar texture, lightness, warmth, and softness. The shawl trade was much important for the economies of various countries (i.e., Kashmir, Ladakh, Yarkand, Tibet, etc.) who were directly or indirectly involved in it. It was the main item in the export trade of Kashmir and this industry generated chief means of income for the people. The present work here is intended to study the shawl industry, shawl as a commodity of trade and the people who were directly or indirectly involved in this industry. Also an attempt has been made to examine the state approach towards the shawl industry of Kashmir during the period under study.

Key Words: Kashmir, Mughal, Wool, Shawl, Industry, Trade, Traders.

Shawl Industry

Shawl was prepared from a special kind of wool imported from Ladakh and other wool producing regions, i.e., Rodokh and Chan-than.¹ Shawl wool was exported only to Kashmir from Ladakh from a very remote period according to ancient customs and engagements and all attempts to convey it to other countries were punished by confiscation. The agreement was well in vogue in the nineteenth century when Moorcroft visited this region.² Wool was also imported from Central Turkistan, Yarkand and Kashghar.³ The complex structure of the shawl industry in Kashmir largely depended on a network of brokers (like bakals, pashm faroshes, muqeems, etc.). Their role in the collection of wool from the distant regions was relatively significant.

We have inadequate information about the shawl industry prior to the Mughal occupation of the valley. However, there are few references regarding this industry during the reign of Sultan Zain-ul Abidin (1420-70 C.E.), which indicate that this industry flourished during his period.⁴ During the Mughal period, we are informed that around 120,000 artisans

¹ William Moorcroft and George Trebeck, *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Panjab; in Ladakh and Kashmir; in Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz, and Bokhara, 1819-1825*, John Murray, London, 1841, vol. I, p. 346-47.

² Ibid., p. 347.

³ Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, Ali Mohammad & Sons, Srinagar, 1959, 2nd edition 1974, pp. 245-46; Abdul Majid Mattoo, 'Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

⁴ Shrivara, *Jainarajatarangini*, transl. by Jogesh Chunder Dutt, *Kings of Kashmir*, Calcutta, vol. III, p. 151.

(both men and women) were employed in more than 40,000 textile looms (karkhanas) in the shawl industry in Srinagar.⁵

The caravans of Kashmiri merchants travelled every year from mountain to mountain to collect the fine wool (two kinds of wool, i.e., tous and pashm) of which shawls were manufactured.⁶ The agents or middlemen of the Kashmiri merchants who were employed by them in Ladakh collected the wool there. During the summer months (May, June, July and August), this wool was transported to Kashmir from Ladakh through the employment of labourers and other available means of transport system by the merchants.⁷ According to Moorcroft who visited the valley in 1820, about 800 loads of wool were annually exported to Kashmir.⁸

State Approach

The shawl industry received a great patronage from Sultan Zain-ul Abidin. His efforts in the development of this industry can be assessed from the fact that at a period when Kashmir was an isolated country and communications with the outside world were very difficult, Kashmiris successfully carried on the shawl trade worth 50 lakh rupees annually with distant corners of the globe.⁹ The shawl industry was a major source of revenue to the state treasury during the Sultanate period of Kashmir. It can be appraised by the fact that the Mughals rulers made numerous efforts to make this industry a state property even before their occupation of the valley in 1586 C.E.¹⁰

We are informed by the Abul Fazl that Akbar took great interest in the development of this industry. His efforts resulted into the further expansion of this industry.¹¹ We find that the Mughal court (particularly nobility and aristocracy class) emerged as the chief consumers of Kashmir shawls.¹² The Mughal imperial court was the main customer of the Kashmiri shawls, and large transactions were carried on there. Manucci says that a great deal of fine linen [shawl] cloth which is made in Kashmir is used by the Mughal nobility.¹³ Nevertheless, Mughal period

⁵ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, vol. II, p. 20; A. I. Chicherov, *Indian Economic Development in the 16th-18th Centuries: Outline History of Crafts & Trade*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971, pp. 216-17.

⁶ Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, pp. 419-20, 425-27.

⁷ Ippolito Desideri, *Mission to Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth-Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri, S.J.*, transl. by Michael J. Sweet, ed. by Leonard Zwilling, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2010, p. 73.

⁸ Moorcroft and Trebeck, *Travels in Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan*, vol. I, p. 347.

⁹ Pandit Anand Koul, *Geography of the Jammu and Kashmir State*, Calcutta, second edition, revised, 1925, p. 37.

¹⁰ Abul Fazl, *Akbar Nama*, tr. by H. Beveridge, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, vol. III, p. 527; Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhabu-ut-Tawarikh*, tr. by George S. A. Ranking, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, reprinted 1990, vol. II, p. 363.

¹¹ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, tr. by H. Blochmann, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1873, vol. I, pp. 91-92.

¹² Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Padshah Nama*, tr. by Hamid Afaq Siddiqi, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, Delhi, 1910, vol. II, pp. 163-64; Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, vol. I, pp. 91-92; A. M. Mattoo, 'Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

¹³ Niccalao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogol or Mughal India 1653-1708*, tr. by William Irvine, rep. in LPP, Delhi, 1990, vol. II, p. 402.

led to a greater commercialization of the shawl industry.¹⁴ The Mughal period witnessed a considerable technical development and reorganization of this industry.¹⁵

Shawl was considered a symbol of prestige and it had become an obsession with every Mughal noble to have a fine shawl of Kashmir.¹⁶ Hence, shawls received much demand and were exported to every clime of the Mughal empire.¹⁷ A large quantity of Kashmiri shawls was purchased by the Mughal emperors and nobility and the subahdars often sent these shawls as presents to their patrons.¹⁸ Shawls were also bestowed by the Mughal emperors as khilat (robes of honor) on the nobles, courtiers, etc. as a mark of respect.¹⁹ The price of a shawl made for the Umaras was one hundred and fifty rupees.²⁰

Trade

Shawls were exported to the different parts of the Mughal empire, like Agra, Lahore, Ahmedabad, Gujarat,²¹ etc. Kashmir shawls were exported to Lhasa (capital of Central Tibet), Bhutan, Nepal, and Kathmandu.²² There was well established export of shawl-goods from Kashmir to Iran during the first half of the 16th century.²³ Shawls were also exported outside the Mughal frontiers.²⁴ Mughal rulers also sent the Kashmir shawls as a token of respect to the foreign rulers.²⁵

From the mid-17th century, Kashmir started to gain market in the European countries.²⁶ Later, the Kashmiri shawls also received great demand from the Central Asian and Russian

¹⁴ A. M. Mattoo, 'Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

¹⁵ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, tr. by H. S. Jarret, corrected and further annotated by Jadunath Sarkar, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1949, vol. II, p. 170.

¹⁶ Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, p. 403; Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, vol. II, p. 402.

¹⁷ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, vol. I, pp. 91-92; Ibid.

¹⁸ Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, *Maasir-ul Umara*, transl. by H. Beveridge, revised, annotated and completed by Bains Prashad, vol. I, p. 715; Abdul Majid Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals 1586-1752 A.D.*, Golden Horde Enterprises, Srinagar, 1988, p. 220.

¹⁹ See Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, transl. Alexander Rogers, Low Price Publications, Delhi, rep. 2006, 2 vols. See also Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, M. C. Sarkar & Sons, Calcutta, 1920, p. 14.

²⁰ Other shawls were sold for just more than fifty rupees. Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, p. 403.

²¹ Francisco Pelsaert, *The Remonstrantie*, transl. by W. H. Moreland and P. Geyl, *Jahangir's India*, W. Heffer and Son Ltd., Cambridge, 1925, pp. 19, 36; Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogol or Mughal India 1653-1708*, transl. by William Irvine, rep. in LPP, Delhi, 1990, vol. II, p. 402; William Foster (ed.), *The English Factories in India, 1637-1641*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1912, p. 135.

²² Anonymous, *A Short History of Chinese Turkistan*, transl. by Abdul Majid Mattoo, Centre of Central Asian Studies, Srinagar, 1981, f. 1b; Ippolito Desideri, *An Account of Tibet: The Travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, 1712-1727*, ed. by Filippo De Filippi, 1931, George Routledge & Sons Ltd., London, revised edition, 1937, pp. 132-33; Françoise Pommerat (ed.), *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century: The Capital of the Dalai Lamas*, p. 153; Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, pp. 22-23.

²³ Janet Rizvi, *The Kashmir Shawl in the Mughal Period*, Marg: A Magazine of the Arts, 2009, p.

²⁴ Sujan Rai Bhandari, *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, ed. M. Zafar Hasan, Delhi, 1918, pp. 80-83.

²⁵ Abdul Majid Mattoo, 'Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

²⁶ Akhtar Riazuddin, *The History of Handicrafts*, National Hijra Council, Islamabad, 1988, p. 330.

markets.²⁷ During the late eighteenth century, Kashmiri shawls were used as a table cloth for decoration purpose in France, and in the nineteenth century, France was the chief importer of Kashmiri shawls.²⁸

Merchants and peddlers in caravans carried the finished Kashmiri shawls overland to the different parts of the world like Russia, Ottoman empire, Central Asia and China.²⁹ Merchants from diverse regions of the world like Persia, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Yarkand, Ladakh, Tibet, Kashghar, and Turkistan came to Kashmir to purchase the shawls. During the late eighteenth century, we find the merchants from Russia also entered the shawl markets of Kashmir.³⁰

The use of Kashmir shawls spread from court circles to the business class as well. We learn from Thevenot that although shawls were manufactured in several different colours, the Banias or traders almost always feuille-morte, or “dead-leaf” colour, corresponding certainly to khudrang.³¹ Various kinds of shawls were produced by the Kashmiri merchants as demanded from the Indian business class.³²

Conclusion

Shawl trade received great patronage from the state as it provided a great amount of revenue to its treasury. The Mughal occupation of Kashmir created new market places for the shawl merchants in different parts of the empire. There was a revival of shawl trade between Kashmir and the European countries during this period. The presence of the foreign merchants in the markets of Kashmir provided a great stimulus to the shawl trade and connected this regional economy with the global economy.

²⁷ K. Warikoo, *Central Asia and Kashmir*, Gian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 62-67.

²⁸ John Irwin, *The Marg*, vol. 6, p. 46; Ghulam Hasan Khoihami, *Tarikh-i Hasan*, vol. I, ff. 106-07; Cf. A. M. Mattoo, ‘Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

²⁹ Michelle Maskiell, ‘Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500-2000’, *Journal of World History*, vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring, 2002), pp. 27-65.

³⁰ P. M. Kemp (transl. & ed.), *Russian Travellers to India and Persia (1624-1798)*, Kotov, Yefremov, Danibegov, Jiwan Prakashan, Delhi, 1959, pp. 81-83.

³¹ Cf. Janet Rizvi and Monisha Ahmed, *Pashmina: The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond*, Marg Publications, Mumbai, 2009, p. 163.

³² *Dasturul-Amal-i-Asar-i-Alamgiri*, Add. 6599, British Museum, Rotograph No. 53, in CAS, Deptt. Of History, AMU, Aligarh, ff. 70-71; Cf. Farzana Ashfaque, ‘Shawl and Carpet Industry in Kashmir under the Mughals’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 70 (2009-2010), pp. 285-296.