

Socio-Cultural Impact of Afghan Rule

Firdous Ahmad Tali

PhD Scholar in Dept. of History
SSS University of Technology And Medical Science
Sehore, Bhopal

Abstract

In loose and broad terms socio-cultural dynamics ask the changes within the social and cultural attributes of a society. Though social and cultural attributes are seen as an integral whole and hence inseparable, yet, social here refers to the structural aspects such as patterned interactions. By cultural attributes we refer to the collectively shared, values, ideas and symbols which are associated with human groups. Thus, socio-cultural dynamics could be a universal and unchanged method. Since no society can be static, all societies at all times pass through this process of change. Socio-cultural dynamics is a highly complex phenomenon. If the forces of change emanate within the social structure, it may be termed as endogenous. The rise of socio-religious ideologies such as Buddhism and Jainism may be example of endogenous change while the changes occurring through the advent of Islam or Christianity that come from outside may be put under the category of exogenous changes. Changes within Kashmir society occurred through both of this processes¹. The spread of Islam in Kashmir from the latter half of the fourteenth century onwards brought about a great transformation in the life of the people. The cultural contacts that were established with Persia and Turkistan and therefore the flow of an outsized number of Muslims from those countries also affected profound social changes. However despite this foreign impact that has far-reaching, links with the past were not broken, for this Kashmiris refused to relinquish up their beliefs and practices completely. That is why throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there was a constant conflict between those who were eager to introduce the Perso-Islamic way of life. With In the end, however, the conflict was resolved by the fusion of the old and the new. This resulted in the emergence of a society in which the old ideas and institution were mixed up with the new.

Key words: Peasantry, polo, *Roah*, *Pilvas*

INTRODUCTION

Society

While studying the social, cultural structure prevailing in medieval Kashmir, one is confronted with the paucity of material on the subject, there is however, better and more detailed data available on the Mughal period, but the conditions prevailing under Afghan are shrouded in darkness. There is scanty material available on the brief period of the afghan rule. Society in Kashmir during the Hindu times was categorized into four casts. But these divisions were not as fierce as in India. However, Brahmans had occupied highest position. Those who were in charge of temples were exempted from Taxes.² With the spread of Islam, the division of society based on caste disappeared from most part. They were replaced by class distinction which in certain cases retained the old rigidity. Islam, no doubt, provided a unifying and leaving force, the Sufi's tried to bridge the gulf between the different classes. But, owing to the economic disparities and functional differences real social equality could not be achieved³.

Social composition under Afghans

Kashmir society under Afghan can be classified under the following major groups;

1. Afghan Ruling Elite
2. Officials of Afghan Government
3. Landed Elite
4. Religious Elite
5. Peasantry
6. Village Professionals
7. Urban Artisans

Position of Woman

Women are the soul of any human society, but until recently she has not been the subject of academic focus. Hence, very little has come to light regarding the facets of her personality ranging from socio-economic status to psychosocial-problems.

True, that Kashmir has the credit of producing a roll of illustrious women, who have played significant role in fashioning the distinctive socio-cultural and religious-political make up of Kashmiri society. However this applied to the section of Kashmir ladies who belonged to ruling elite and different blue sections.

The real image and portrayal of Kashmir woman remained unattended as she was trusted to be an untouchable and unhistorical for any discussion and discourse, focusing and projecting few woman of royal status never qualifies in any sense cataloguing the true history of Kashmir women⁴.The marginalized Kashmiri woman expressed themselves in numerous kind of Kashmir

popular literature. No study of a society is considered complete without a reference to the position of woman in it. The position of woman in a exceeding society reflects the cultural level, mental refinement and the standard of its civilization⁵. The ancient historical literature bear evidence to the fact that woman in Kashmir enjoyed the maximum degree of freedom and liberty⁶. No socio-religious pursuit or exercise was deemed complete without the active participation of woman⁷. With the establishment of Muslim Sultanate in the fourteenth century, woman in Kashmir receive new incentives to continue their literary pursuits⁸. This is evidenced by a galaxy of celebrated ladies of Kashmir produced during the period. But the dawn of Afghan rule in Kashmir signaled an never ending period of gloom, aversion and degeneration⁹. with In the wake of Afghan rule not solely the political fortunes of the state underwent a drastic change—Kashmiri woman, who once occupied outstanding position in the social surroundings of Kashmir, went into the deep oblivion, obscurity, ignorance illiteracy, disease and dependence¹⁰. Her response, reaction and the protest against the injustice to which she was subject to. she expressed it in the form of the folk songs like “*Roah and Wanvun.*”¹¹

Early Marriage

Though the popular literature does not provide us any definite clue which may help us to ascertain the actual marriageable age of Kashmir girl, but we can infer from innumerable folk expressions that girls were married at the very early age in Kashmir¹².

The custom of marrying boys and girls at an early age among both Muslims and Hindus became popular during the rule of the Afghans.¹³. An Afghan would not molest a married woman, however, pretty. So the only remedy to save the person and honor of a woman was marrying her young¹⁴. The evil practice continued beyond the Afghan rule till its prohibition by law during recent years. Under the Afghan who subjected the people in general to great hardships, woman became the special target of their licentious behavior. Kashmiri woman irrespective of caste or creed, were physically and spiritually shattered. Their presence in every sphere of social activity was totally eclipsed.¹⁵.

Food and Drink

Since from the traditional time rice had been the stable food of Kashmir people. . Rice was cooked in various ways generally it was boiled and then eaten. Some of it was kept overnight to be taken in the morning¹⁶.

Under Persian influence various kinds of *Pilvas*, like *Zard-Pilav*, tursh-Pilav and *Shulla-Pilav*, were introduced¹⁷. Little wheat was consumed, because it was not much grown in the country.¹⁸. Barely was considered as a simple food, fit only for poor, or for people who had renounced the world,¹⁹ meat, fish, eggs and vegetables from ancient times has been the most important articles of Kashmiri diet and continued to be so under the Muslims.²⁰. Pork was eaten by large section of Hindus in pre Islamic period.²¹.

The staple food during the Afghan period was rice, fish, and various vegetables. The Mughals were epicurean by temperament and got the pleasure of the table. They introduced their choicest cuisine and also the Kashmiri like Goshtaba, Kabab, and Roganjosh. Later the Afghans added their bread and Pilao to his rich repertoire.

Impact on Persian Language

The history of cultural relations between Kashmir and Persia goes back to ancient times. This is evident from the tiles of the Harvan monastery near Srinagar and from the ancient sculptures of Kashmir which bear unmistakably sasanian characteristics.²² till the fourteenth century, the dominant note in Kashmir culture had been Indian. It was only with foundation of the Sultanate that more profound and enduring links were established with the centre of Persian culture and as a result, the Indian influence was gradually replaced by the Perso-Islamic element, though it was never completely eliminated but with the increasing patronage extended to Persian scholarship by the Sultans, Sanskrit receded to the background and Kashmiri students switched over to the study of Persia, which became the language of educated classes and even found its way into the villages. The process was completed in the reign of Zain-ul-Abidin. Therefore, Kashmir created the poets and writers in Persia whose fantastic thing about vogue and depth of thought equaled that of the literatures of Persia, if that country is proud of its Firdausi, Hafiz, Rumi and Nizami, Kashmir is equally proud of its Sarfi, Ghani and Hubbi. Hafiz was not indulging in poetic imagination when he sung.²³

“The black-eyed beauties of Kashmir and the Turks of Samarkand sing and dance to the strains of Hafiz of Shiraz’s Verse”.

With the advent of Mughal rule Persian scholarship attained new heights in Kashmir; not only the extensive works written on subjects – like medicine, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy and religion but there appeared gems in poetry, literature, history, biography and travel. Persian language suited the temperament and style of the Kashmiris scholars. The peaceful rule of the Mughals and the generous patronage that the Emperors and their governors bestowed on learning and literature resulted in a full blown of Persian scholarship in Kashmir.

When the decline of Mughals became certain it was by nature that its impact was found on all shades of life and society, but still there was not complete collapse, it was only when Kashmir become the part of Afghanistan in 1753, things turned different. Its one reason was that Afghans were basically Warriors.²⁴31 and had a little interest towards developmental activities. But this impact was not seen on Persia language which had by then touched its height to the sky.

No doubt political uncertainty which was the hall mark of Afghan government in Kashmir, affected negatively almost all shades of life, but it is quite surprising that the discipline of Persian scholarship witnessed unimaginable upward direction. Though most of the Afghan governors possessed little interests in the promotion of art and learning but during the governorship of Sukh Jiwan Mal (1753-1762) literary activities reached to unexpected heights. It was during this period that poets were provided every kind of incentive to undertake multiple projects which aimed to translate Persian classics in other languages and particularly effort was made to bring out a comprehensive history of Kashmir on the model of “*Shahnama*” of Firdausi, one of the famous literary work.

Pastimes

Among the games played during the medieval times Polo held a place of honor. Every town and city has a Polo ground called Chawgan.²⁵ and where there was none; the game was played in the main thoroughfare and watched the people from shops and windows. The game was perhaps introduced into Kashmir from Gilgit where it is still popular.

The game of the common people was the simple version of Polo-hockey. We have a reference to this game in a saying of Lalleh Wari, There were other marshal game too like single-strikes and fights with slings for the people to amuse them with.²⁶ The favorite pastimes of the royalty and of Afghan nobility were hunting.

In tune with the available sources, Kashmiris under Afghans developed a unique set of recreational activities to provide them comfort and solace amid great psychological strains. These pastimes include, boating race, enjoying musical parties during summer nights on the waters of famous Dal Lake etc.

Drama, Dance and Music

The Persian influences in the domain of performing arts though reached its height under the royal support of Mughal, but with the establishment of Afghan rule in Kashmir, There started a process of decline as the artists lost the patronage of ruling Afghan elite. However the „*Hafiz Nagma*“, *Sufiana*“ music and Kashmiri folk „*Chakria*“ and „*Bacha Nagma*“ attained tremendous public acknowledgement as the new means of popular entertainment.

The *Dastaan goi*“ or storey telling art in Kashmir received new impetus during the harsh Afghan governance. Both climatic fluctuations and oppressive governing apparatus forced Kashmiris to develop new means of entertainment. As against „*Hafiza Nagma*“, which became a major recreational device to solicit the urge of Afghan governing elite, the common Kashmiri developed „*bacha nagma*“ as its substitute to entertain themselves. To fulfill the objective, Kashmiri poets undertook the job of translating several epic and love ballads of Persian classics into regional Kashmiri language. The people in rural Kashmir, more particularly during chilly winter nights managed to arrange story telling parties with a sole purpose to lessen the pain received as a result of Afghan brutality.

Conclusion

During the Afghan rule in Kashmir (1753-1819) though Kashmiris suffered a lot as a result of multiple factors, yet, the socio-cultural fabric did not witness a radical change. True, some Afghan families like, Bamzais“, Qazalbashis“, Afridis“, Khaibarries, settled in Kashmir and the valley began to be sported by some Afghan colonies, but Kashmiri far-off themselves from such families as the roots of alienation and distress were so deep that even the religious connectivity could not eradicate them.

Since Persian continued to be an official language, the learned community of Kashmiri Pundits' who had earned mastery in Persian scholarship rose to the position of eminence in Afghan governing culture. The revenue administration was exclusively handled by Kashmiri pundits'. The most astonishing feature in the domain of culture under the Afghan governance in Kashmir was that there ushered a new era of literary bloom even amid appalling heights of Afghan brutality. Kashmir produced roll of eminent poets in Persian language who won great name and fame in the literary circles of Persian scholarship. Alongside the creative artistic pursuits, different genres of folk literature and art assumed new heights of performing beauty. The Kashmiri „*Bhande Pather*“ and Kashmiri folk „*chorus*“ known as „*chakri*“, in vernacular became the main recreational devices to pleasure common Kashmiris.

In tune with the Afghan fashion in dress, Kashmiris adopted a dress code having close resemblance with Afghan dress code. The body wears like wide trousers, *Sadri*”, *Qameez*” bear direct imprint of Afghan influence.

The most noteworthy contribution of Afghan rule in Kashmir, in the socio-culture discipline was the issuance of coins by Afghan governor Atta Mohammad Khan (1806-1813) in the name of national saint poet of Kashmir (Shaikh Nur-ud-Din Rishi). The Saint is considered to be a logo of Kashmiris composite culture and plural social fabric.

Though being Muslims, Afghans never allowed faith in shaping their state policy. Most of the Afghan governors were send from Kabul to Kashmirs, often showed total disconnect from the centre and this speaks volumes about their personality and fragile commitment. The lust for wealth, power and authority marked the chief features of Afghan governance in Kashmir. Among Muslims, some families like *Bandays*, *Naqash Bandhis*, *Kanths* and *Begs*, assumed prominence for having close association with the Afghan official cadres.

The serious study of literary and oral evidences tends us to believe that Kashmiri feminine beauty received an irreparable loss due to the scandalous character of Afghan nobility. The women folk of respectable Muslim and Hindu families preferred to remain indoors and „*purdah*” began to be used by well off Muslim and Hindu women folk with serious strictness.

References

- 1) Hassnain Nedeem Society and Culture sPage 4-5.
- 2) Stein M.A Kings of Kashmir, p. 174.
- 3) Hasam Mahibubul, Kashmir under Sultans.
- 4) Women Position in Society, encyclopedia of the Social Science Vol. xv
- 5) Ved, Kumari Ghai (Tr), the Nilmata Purana (Eng) translation Vol I.
- 6) Mohd, Ishak Khan, *Kashmir's Transaction to Islam*.
- 7) Farooq op.cit.,p. 73.
- 8) Bamzai, op. cit., p. 519.
- 9) Pandit Anand Koul, *The Kashmir Pandit* p. 33.
- 10) A-Ain-Akberis II. p. 353
- 11) Tuhfatul-i-Ahbab p.109.
- 12) Srivara p. 274.
- 13) Marocopolo 1, p. 166.
- 14) Stein, op. cit., No II 49.
- 15) Kak, *Handbook of Partab Singh Museum*, p. 405.
- 16) Stein, op. cit., Vol. No p. 177.
- 17) Browne, *Literary History of Persia III*. p. 283
- 18) Temple, *The Word of Lalla*, p. 208.
- 19) Lawrence op. cit., P. 252.
- 20) Bamzai, op. cit., p. 529.
- 21) Sofi, G. M. D., Vol. II, p. 473. 33) Ibid, 478.
- 22) Temple, *The Word of Lalla*, p. 208.
- 23) Lawrence op. cit., P. 252.
- 24) Bamzai, op. cit., p. 529.