

Kashmir under the Mughals: Strategic Significance, Governance Reforms, and Revival

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Abstract

During the Mughal rule, Kashmir occupied a significant and strategic role within the vast Mughal Empire. Located in the vicinity of the Kabul region, which functioned as a crucial access point to Central Asia, the region of Kashmir experienced the reign of influential dynasty rulers such as Akbar, Jahangir, Shah-i-Jahan, and Aurangzeb. The conquest undertaken by the group above not only successfully resolved deep-rooted internal disputes but also facilitated the establishment of a more centralized system of governance. The toll duties were eliminated, and a deliberate endeavour was undertaken to strengthen and expand the region's road infrastructure, substantially boosting commercial activities and trade. Furthermore, the successful execution of progressive agricultural reforms was crucial in revitalizing the province's deteriorating economy. The emperors' decision to reallocate resources from extravagant construction projects to more useful activities played a crucial role in preserving their vast wealth, ultimately facilitating the development of Kashmir into a renowned destination known as a "Heaven on Earth". The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the diverse impact of the Mughal era on the region of Kashmir, encompassing several aspects such as the economy, culture, and infrastructure.

Keywords: Mughal Empire, economy, cultural aspects, historical aspects, Kashmir governance etc.

Introduction

The historical account effectively depicts the enduring Mughal fascination in Kashmir dating back to the era of Babar. In 1531, Kamran, the offspring of Babar, endeavoured conquest, albeit of a transient nature. The accession of Akbar to the throne in 1556 was a significant turning point, as he commenced active involvement in matters about Kashmir. As a result, the Sultans of Kashmir presented lavish offerings, symbolizing their allegiance and acknowledgement of Mughal supremacy, drawing parallels to the historical practices observed by kings such as Samudra Gupta of the Gupta Kingdom. (Chandra 1997) The period known as the Chak rule lasted from 1561 to 1586; he witnessed the emergence of tribal tensions that resulted in social unrest within the region. The accession of Sultan Ali Shah in 1570 and his public speech at Jamia Masjid Srinagar aimed to alleviate communal tensions. However, the conflicts persisted despite these efforts, leading future rulers to seek external aid. This vulnerability presented a potential avenue for external intervention, as evidenced by the events of 1573 when Akbar sent envoys to negotiate a marital union between the Kashmiri royalty and Prince Saleem. The ensuing conflicts over succession, which encompassed Yusuf Khan's assertion and Abdal Chak's rejection, exacerbated

the region's intricate political dynamics. The rule of Syed Mubarak Baihaqi in 1579 was afterwards succeeded by the dominance of Lohar Chak, resulting in a recurrence of administrative instability. The significance of Yusuf Shah Chak's expedition to Lahore through Jammu in 1580, in his quest for assistance from the Mughal Empire, highlights the strategic value of forging alliances with influential leaders in Delhi. In 1581, Akbar's decision to despatch diplomats manifested his inclination towards establishing a direct connection with Shah Chak. The incidents above manifest the complex interplay of power dynamics and political manoeuvring within the historical context of the Mughal Empire's interaction with the region of Kashmir.

The interaction between Yusuf Shah Chak, the King of Kashmir, and the Mughal ambassadors brought profound apprehensions concerning Akbar's underlying motives to light. Yusuf Shah Chak's decision to abstain from paying personal respect to Akbar exacerbated the already tense relations between the two. This greatly angered the Mughals, as they held aspirations of incorporating Kashmir into their territory. Yusuf Shah was subsequently detained as a result of the escalating tensions. However, he was subsequently granted bail. The demise of the individual in question in September 1592 signified a noteworthy period in the history of Kashmir, as evidenced by his interment in Bihar's Biswak, which serves as a testament to the lasting consequences of these occurrences.

After the death of Yusuf Shah, Yaqoob Shah Chak declared his autonomy from prior contractual agreements and assumed the position of a sovereign monarch under the patronage of Akbar, a group of aristocrats spearheaded by prominent individuals such as Shams Chak, Malik Hassan Chadoora, Alam Sher Magre, and Ali Dar, engaged in a conspiracy against the just crowned monarch, following a brief period of reconciliation, the nobility and Yaqoob Shah experienced a momentary respite in their conflict. However, this period of harmony was short-lived. The culmination of spiritual conflicts resulted in a significant confrontation at Sopore, where the rebels suffered defeat, causing dissatisfaction among the Mughals. (Gupta 1970)

Given these recent developments, Qazim Khan tendered his resignation from the esteemed role of emperor, a decision duly sanctioned by Akbar. Yusuf Khan Rizvi has been designated as the recently appointed governor of the region of Kashmir. Confronted with escalating difficulties, the Kashmiri monarch in exile sought sanctuary in Kishtwar, while his friend Shamus Chak escaped to Karnao. Notwithstanding several obstacles, they reemerged during winter, initiating surprise attacks on the Mughal Empire. In a significant historical development in 1588, Yusuf Khan emerged victorious in his confrontation against Qazim Khan, a prominent figure within the Mughal Empire. This triumph enabled Yusuf Khan to establish his authority over Srinagar, consolidating his power and influence in the surrounding area. The triumph indicated a notable alteration in the power dynamics of the Kashmir region during the specified timeframe.

During the reign of Yusuf Khan Rizvi, whom Emperor Akbar chose following the demise of the previous ruler in 1586, the region of Kashmir had a phase characterized by enhanced relations with its indigenous population. This event signified the commencement of an extended period of Mughal governance over the region, which persisted for an astonishing duration of 166 years. (Hasan 1959) During the period above, the geographical positioning of Kashmir played a pivotal role in enabling substantial trade interactions with Central Asia, consolidating its status as a critical conduit for commercial activities.

The Mughal administration implemented a system wherein the governance of Kashmir was entrusted to Subedars, who were carefully selected by the central authority. These individuals were bestowed to oversee administrative matters, ultimately being accountable to the central governing body. Over time, a deliberate effort was made to remove obstacles that hindered Mughal authority, resulting in the incorporation of Kashmir as an integral component of the vast Mughal Empire. The integration process went beyond the bounds of Kashmir, encompassing regions such as Tibet, Kishtwar, Poonch, Baltistan, and Iskardo, which were progressively incorporated into the Mughal empire.

The development above marked a significant and pivotal change for the region, thus freeing it from a prolonged period of isolation and seclusion. The district was expeditiously promoted to the rank of a province, with its administration being committed to a council of Subedars nominated by the central cabinet authority. As a result, the region of Kashmir has been subjected to direct governance by the central government, a system that remains in place presently, with sub-governors overseeing its administration.

Kashmiri Historical Culture

The architectural milieu of Kashmir serves as a monument to its construction customs. The major construction method for residences in the region involves using unburned bricks placed within wooden frames. These structures commonly incorporate lumber from cedar, oak, and fir trees. Regrettably, the extensive use of timber in the construction realm has been a contributing factor to the recurrent incidence of urban fires. Within the upper echelons of society, the predominant building materials employed for construction purposes consisted of stone, lime, and baked bricks. Srinagar, a city along the Jhelum River, exhibited a remarkable architectural landscape. The urban area extended over both river banks, accommodating a concentrated populace living in closely grouped residential structures along the thoroughfares. Although the streets were adorned with hewn blocks, they were relatively narrow, yet the city was teeming with vibrant activity. During that era, the inclusion of doors was not a prevalent characteristic. However, this custom underwent development throughout the course of time, coinciding with the construction of mud walls surrounding properties.

The villas in the region were widely recognized for their vineyards and plentiful ivy, which were embellished with plane and poplar plants. Most of these residences were intentionally positioned close to the Jhelum and Dal lakes. Although the floors and walls of the palaces were lavishly decorated, the interior areas were generally embellished more modestly. The interaction between building materials and architectural elements of Kashmir's residential structures indicates their unique and individualistic nature.

The utilization of mud bricks distinguishes the architectural style observed in the villages of Kashmir encased within wooden frames to construct dwellings. The roofing materials consist of rice straw thatching, specifically engineered to mitigate snow build-up. Historically, the inhabitants of Kashmir have adhered to their hereditary occupations, predominantly centred around agricultural practices such as cultivation, farming, and livestock husbandry. The group in question has historically been perceived as a committed and enduring social class, similar to their ancestors, if somewhat ostracised. Despite encountering obstacles such as premature snowfall and

substantial precipitation during the spring and autumn seasons, the village's inhabitants have adopted a serene and satisfied lifestyle. An intriguing characteristic of their way of life is the utilization of the "kangar," a conventional mobile heating device, which frequently perplexes visitors and underscores the villagers' ingenuity in adjusting to their surroundings.

In the winter, the villagers heavily depend on the renowned compact brazier as a vital source of warmth. The villages are encompassed by natural settings that exhibit remarkable, beautiful qualities, characterized by gently cascading waterfalls, tranquil groves of trees, and vast panoramic vistas. The features above play a significant role in enhancing the overall appeal and attractiveness of village life in Kashmir.

The clothing practices in the region of Kashmir demonstrated a wide range of variations across different cultural and religious communities. The prevailing environmental circumstances significantly impacted the clothing choices of individuals. Both adherents of Hinduism and Islam engage in the cultural tradition of shaving their heads while growing and maintaining beards. Despite the turban being a traditional form of headwear, many individuals chose to don a hat with a skull-like shape. The adoption of turbans can be attributed to the Muslim community, although the prevalence of trousers was relatively uncommon. Moreover, ordinary individuals abstained from donning leather footwear as a gesture of politeness, opting instead for "Lahore," a customary footgear fashioned from interlaced rice straw. The use of wooden sandals was also widespread.

Remarkably, after the extensive assimilation of Islam, Jahangir asserts that distinguishing between a Kashmiri Hindu and a Muslim based on their attire became a formidable task. The sartorial differentiations that afterwards materialized, delineating a Pandit from a Muslim, plausibly originated during the reign of Shah Jahan. Until a recent period, the inhabitants of Kashmir had comparable customs about their attire. (Habib 1982)

In the inclement winter season, the well-being of a Kashmiri individual hinged upon the utilization of fundamental items such as the "Kangar," which was strategically placed in proximity to the abdomen to provide warmth, as well as a woollen cloak that served as a protective barrier against the low temperatures. Aurangzeb exhibited dissatisfaction upon witnessing the absence of conventional filing cabinets among ladies, potentially alluding to a specific form of storage or portable apparatus for personal belongings. This statement provides valuable insights into the intricate aspects of cultural customs and sartorial norms prevalent in that particular period.

A heterogeneous assortment of materials distinguished the culinary milieu of Srinagar during the Mughal epoch. Even among the socioeconomically disadvantaged portions of the population, dietary practices frequently incorporated ghee, milk, beef, onions, wine, pickles, and vinegar. Rice, fish, and various vegetables were commonly consumed as dietary staples. Notably, butter and fats were not extensively employed in culinary practices due to apprehensions regarding their presumed negative consequences in the frigid environment.

The Kashmiri culinary artisans demonstrated their culinary prowess by skillfully crafting meals such as Goshtaba, Kabab, and Roganjosh. Incorporating a diverse range of spices, including pepper, turmeric, ginger, cloves, chillies, and saffron, was a customary practice that augmented both the taste and aesthetic appeal of culinary preparations.

Regarding hydration, individuals residing in South Kashmir commonly abstained from using river water instead of the tepid and readily digestible waters sourced from Dal Lake. The Mughals exhibited a notable inclination for cuisine, actively engaging in the pursuit of refined culinary experiences. The organizers demonstrated a commitment to providing high-quality meals without any financial constraints while also deriving immense pleasure from the social atmosphere fostered at the dining table. It is worth mentioning that the orchards lacked any restrictions, granting individuals the liberty to freely harvest and relish the fruits, thereby extending an inclusive welcome to partake in the abundance of the land.

The social stratification during the Mughal era in Kashmir significantly influenced women's status and behaviours. Women from the upper strata of society were afforded certain privileges aligned with their rich status. Notably, there were instances where Sufi women assumed leadership positions within Khanqahs following the passing of their husbands. Regrettably, in specific cases, Muslim women encountered the abhorrent custom of being interred alive after the demise of their husbands. Polyandry was a prevalent cultural practice among Buddhists in locations such as Ladakh and Askardu.

The imperial orders issued by Jahangir and Shah Jahan openly expressed disapproval towards inter-marriages. They imposed strong prohibitions on the practice of sati, which involves the self-immolation of widows. Child marriage was prevalent in the Hindu and Muslim cultures of the Subah region. The aristocracy of the Mughal court exhibited a notable preference for matrimonial alliances, with daughters hailing from Kashmir renowned for their distinctive physical attractiveness. (Jahangir 1999) In the 17th century, European explorers were captivated by the allure of fair-complexioned beauties possessing stunning eyes and unusual noses. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that conventional beauty standards may not have applied to most women from the general population who were frequently exposed to sunlight and high temperatures, as they typically exhibited a pinkish complexion.

Women from the nobility and the Ulama adhered to a practice known as purdah, which involved maintaining a tight seclusion within their residences. Their mobility outside the home was limited, typically restricted to more intimate settings or while utilizing litter. The practice of Sati was also observed throughout the Hindu communities residing in these locations. It is worth mentioning that there was a significant occurrence of inter-marriages between Hindus and Muslims in regions such as Rajouri and Bhimber, demonstrating the intricate dynamics between cultural and religious customs during this specific era.

During the Mughal period, many Kashmiri girls were wedded to Mughal nobility, while a select few incredibly attractive young women were employed as maids. The predominant perspective on education in the region of Kashmir was predominantly secular, as both the Hindu and Muslim communities preferred early marriages among both genders. Regrettably, there were occurrences in which highly brilliant women such as Laleshwari and Habba Khatun were united in matrimony with men who were incompatible with their talents, leading to marriages that ended in calamity.

In juxtaposition to Akbar's matrimonial legislation, which instituted a minimum age threshold of sixteen for girls and fifteen for boys, Kashmir exhibited a more lenient approach towards enforcing these provisions.

Historically, weddings have generally been characterized as familial events, wherein the decision-making process is primarily influenced by the families involved rather than solely determined by the couple. The institution of marriage was widely seen as a social duty, and its consequences were occasionally disastrous. Before the commencement of the wedding ceremony, Kashmiri Pandits performed a traditional nikka rite, thereby emphasizing the complex cultural customs associated with marital unions in the region during that period.

Marital connections were important for the Mughal kings, exemplified by important figures such as Akbar and his successors. The phenomenon above was particularly conspicuous in the custom of Rajput chieftains bestowing their girls as matrimonial partners upon Mughal kings and princes. Even the most influential nobles were convinced to arrange marriages for their daughters with members of the imperial bloodline. The marriage ties had significant and wide-ranging implications since they frequently resulted in the disarming and befriending of rebel chieftains, thereby effectively pacifying those who could have posed a threat. The approach above demonstrated a remarkable display of colonial diplomacy, deftly garnering support from friends while concurrently mitigating potential adversarial influences. (Khan 2013)

The continuity of this tradition was also maintained by the Muslim Sultans, reinforcing its prevalence. Regrettably, the historical record provides limited information concerning the precise responsibilities and influence these women exert within the royal harems. However, the marriage partnerships of the Mughal era were of great importance in the intricate network of political connections and plans.

The Jashan, a joyous assembly, emerged as a highly favoured form of social entertainment within the aristocratic circles during the Mughal Empire. The events above were organized by Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan at notable venues such as the Takht-i-rawans and the captivating gardens of Shalimar, Verinag, and Achabal. Polo, known as Choughan, was a much cherished recreational activity embraced by individuals from many socioeconomic levels in the Subah region. This sport gained popularity not just in the region of Kashmir but also in neighbouring areas such as Tibet and Kishtawar.

In the Maisuma field in Srinagar, youngsters from different localities actively participated in simulated combat scenarios, demonstrating the prevalent enthusiasm for competitive recreational activities. (Khosla 1934) Furthermore, it is worth noting that games like tipcart and hopscotch were prevalent modes of amusement throughout the Mughal era, providing a wide array of recreational options for individuals seeking leisure and entertainment. These leisure activities afforded individuals chances for social engagement, leisure, and pleasure, enhancing the dynamic cultural tapestry of that era.

Furthermore, apart from these festivities, the Kashmir region during the Mughal era also commemorated various other noteworthy events and observances. The Persian architectural achievements were enhanced by the captivating customs of kindling bonfires, illuminations, and organizing joshans (celebratory gatherings), contributing liveliness to the cultural environment.

A significant commemoration occurred on the 13th of Bhadun, signifying the legendary birth of the river Jhelum. The event was commemorated through the illumination of little oil lamps along the banks of the river Jhelum, imparting a sense of enchantment to the surrounding scenery. Moreover, commemorating saints and Sufis'

anniversaries dispersed over the Subah was conducted with utmost reverence. The annual commemorations, known as Urs, of esteemed saints such as Sheikh Noorud-Din Rishi at Charari Sharif, Baba Janbaz Wali at Baramulla, and Rishi Maloo at Islamabad, hold significant importance among the local population. These events are observed with great reverence and contribute to the spiritual enrichment of the region's cultural fabric.

Mughal Era & Its Influence on the Infrastructure of Kashmir

Although several Mughal gardens in and around Srinagar have not withstood the passage of time, those that have persevered continue to be the most noticeable characteristics of the city. Salimar, a rectangular garbage dump adjacent to Dal Lake in Srinagar, extends across three progressively elevated platforms, each embellished with sophisticated pavilions. The Vernag garden, which is worthy of mention, features a spacious, octagonal lake at the origin of the river Jhelum. The garden in question carried significant sentimental value for Nur Jahan, a prominent Persian consort of Jahangir. It was Constructed in 1619-20 and commissioned by Jahangir himself.

Under the patronage of Nur Jahan, a stone mosque known as Patthar Masjid was erected in Srinagar, including distinctive architectural features of India while featuring a roof made of thatched wood. In conjunction with Salimar and Vernag, Jahangir created more gardens in the neighbourhood of Srinagar, such as the one in Achhabal, augmenting the region's cultural and architectural heritage.

Throughout his reign, Shah Jahan, the Mughal emperor, frequently sought respite in the picturesque region of Kashmir. During these visits, he actively contributed to transforming the local landscape by sanctioning the creation of novel gardens and enhancing the old ones. The installation of an arcade surrounding the pool at Vernag Park served to augment its magnificence. In the city of Srinagar, a mosque was constructed by Jahan Ara Begum, the daughter of an individual named Molla Sah Badaksi, as a tribute to her esteemed spiritual mentor. This mosque had a remarkable arched entryway, showcasing the architectural prowess of its design. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Asaf Khan, a minister in the court of Shah Jahan and a sibling of Nur Jahan, played a significant role in the creation of Nesat Bag. This splendid garden, situated near Salimar, encompasses multiple terraces, adding to its grandeur.

The platform construction observed in Kashmiri gardens has elicited conjecture. There is a proposition positing that the architectural design of amphitheatres draws inspiration from the arrangement of grand residences and edifices. This hypothesis suggests that amphitheatres feature a lower forecourt, a central stage intended for communal assemblies, and an elevated platform designated for private purposes. However, a more realistic rationale for implementing terracing is to optimize the utilization of steep slopes, effectively mitigating the topographical obstacles pragmatically.

The architectural structure known as the Pari Maal, alternatively referred to as Pir-e Maal, was created by Dara Sokuh in the year 1644. This tower was originally situated on a steep incline, affording panoramic Srinagar and the Dal Lake vistas. Regrettably, it remains the sole surviving Mughal garden in Kashmir, as the garden and its trees have long since disappeared. In recent years, a significant effort has been made to restore numerous gardens in Kashmir. These restored gardens are now embellished with flowering shrubs and beautiful trees.

However, it is worth noting that the assortment of fruit trees that Jahangir once described is conspicuously lacking. This absence serves as a painful testament to the transformation of the landscape throughout the centuries.

Influence of the Mughal Rulers on Kashmir's Revenue

Jahangir appreciated the Kashmiri shawls, widely recognized as a distinguished textile tradition originating from the area. The shawls possess such unique and highly regarded characteristics that it is difficult to encapsulate their essence with a single description. An alternative kind, thermal, exhibits a greater thickness than a shawl and is characterized by a sleek twill weave. The wool utilized for producing these shawls is obtained from a particular breed of goat indigenous to the region of Tibet. (Levy 1957) The shawls' designs before the Mughal period exhibit notable differences compared to those that evolved during and after the Mughal era. However, the latter demonstrates a remarkable similarity to the customary forms found in Islamic and Iranian contexts.

During the 19th century, there was a significant increase in the demand for Kashmiri shawls among European consumers. Nevertheless, the widespread appeal of these textiles also precipitated their demise since the emergence of mechanically produced replicas from locations such as Paisley, Scotland, ultimately exerted a dominant influence on the market throughout the 1870s. The Mughal dynasty significantly contributed to the advancement of carpet weaving by adopting conventional Persian knotting techniques and incorporating characteristic Persian motifs. Even in the present era, Kashmir remains a significant hub for the production of high-quality carpets in India, serving as a testament to the long-lasting heritage of this particular artistic tradition. (Kaul 1985)

Undoubtedly, even in the present era, the architectural magnificence of the Mughal Empire continues to be a prominent attraction for tourism in the region of Kashmir. A multitude of good effects for the state accompanies the arrival of guests. This encompasses generating revenue, which contributes to government fiscal inflows, along with establishing employment possibilities and business prospects. Expenditure allocated towards hospitality, as well as the sale and importation of associated products and services, enhances the host economy and can potentially promote investments required to facilitate development in various other economic sectors.

Within the taxation domain, the fiscal proceeds generated by the government through tourism can be classified into two primary forms: direct and indirect contributions. Direct contributions are generated through the taxation of income produced from employment within the tourism sector and from enterprises directly associated with tourism. In contrast, indirect contributions stem from levying taxes and fees on goods and services offered to those visiting a particular location. The province has a discernible surge in work opportunities as there is a rise in tourism influx. To fully utilize this potential, it is crucial to establish tourism education as an obligatory element within the school curriculum. (Kennedy 1968) This will not only function as a pivotal instrument for generating employment opportunities but also guarantee the presence of a proficient labour force capable of fulfilling the requirements of visitors who visit the region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Conclusion

The Mughal era was a notable milestone in the history of Kashmir since the territory ceased to exist as an autonomous state, a position it had upheld until the year 1586 A.D. The governance of the Mughal Empire was conducted by the emperors, who delegated authority to their selected subedars. However, it is worth noting that, with few limited exceptions, these subedars frequently engaged in practices that resulted in the oppression and exploitation of the populace, primarily through acts of corruption. Based on testimonies provided by writers and travellers, it is evident that the earlier period in the region had favourable transformations, including resolving internal conflicts. However, the subsequent period posed obstacles that impeded the comprehensive progress and advancement of the Kashmiri populace. The primary difficulties identified encompassed the ineffectiveness within the governmental bureaucracy, societal strife, neglect of public health, and exploitation of peasants. The dissolution of the state was ultimately caused by these circumstances, resulting in the transfer of control from one tyrannical faction to another, including the Afghans, in 1753 A.D. Subsequently, the region has undergone a tumultuous historical trajectory, characterized by a persistent state of adversity and distress.

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