



SITUATION OF TEXTILE AND HANDICRAFTS INDUSTRY DURING DOGRA RULE (1846-1947) IN KASHMIR VALLEY, INDIA

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Abstract: *The beautiful textiles of Kashmir; Shawls, tweeds, home-spuns, carpets-earned international popularity during the period 1846-1947, whereas the shawl industry rose to its apex, it had also its fall, to arise again in the shape of the embroidered or Amlikar shawl. The ancient silk industry was scientifically developed into a modern industry. The carpets of Kashmir became very popular and captured a sizeable foreign market. It would be worthwhile to study these events in detail as the socio-economic life of Kashmir was substantially influenced by these developments.*

Key words: *Dogra, shawl, Amlikar and Home-Spuns.*

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INTRODUCTION

The chief centre of Kashmiri industries is of course Srinagar, but other localities are famous for their special manufactures. Thus Islamabad turns out excellent embroideries. Kulgam is famous for its lacquered woodwork. Every Kashmiri seems to excel as a weaver, and the homespun cloth woven by the villagers in the winter is highly appreciated both by Europeans and visitors.

SHAWL

When Maharaja Gulab Singh became the ruler in 1846 A.D., The shawl trade began to revive. There was again a great demand for shawls in France and other European countries. The income of the state from 1846-1869 was, on an average, seven lakhs of rupee per annum. The best shawls ever made in Kashmir were manufactured in the time of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, between the years 1865-72. They were very fine in texture, very soft in colour, and of the most elaborate and graceful patterns, of a purely Eastern style of decoration. The export of shawl touched a new high- an average 28 lakhs of rupees per annum.

French agents representing famous firms of fashion came to Kashmir to purchase shawls. Messrs. Uhlan and co., Were the agents of the Kashmir state in France. Some of the rich shawl manufactures in Kashmir had their agencies in Europe and a few of them visited the continent personally to push on the sales. Having thus touched the apex of its prosperity, the shawl trade began to dwindle. The Franco-German war of 1870 and its disastrous consequences dealt an almost fatal blow on it. A contemporary writer records that the Kashmiri shawl weavers watched the fate of France in the great struggle with intense excitement and interest-bursting into tears and loud lamentation when the news of Germany's victories reached them. The fashion of using shawls changed. The little flickering life in the trade that remained was practically extinguished by the famine of 1878-79. None suffered more heavily in that calamity than the poor weakly shawl weavers. Maharaja Ranbir Singh advanced ten lakhs of rupees to the shawl manufactures, but the trade never recovered from the shock.

The condition of shawl weavers was pitiable. Sir Richart Temple wrote in 1887; they form "a miserable class, badly paid, badly nourished and badly housed and therefore physically and morally wretched". Twelve years later also, a shawl weaver was described as "a sickly weak kneed creature, usually involved in debt, and earning a miserable pittance daily. If some of



the ladies using these shawls could behold the half-starved emaciated creatures who weave them,” remarked Maj. Genl. Macintyre 1899, the shawls “would not rest so lightly on their shoulders”. But when the raffle shawls began to be made, as we shall subsequently see, their condition improved of the three hands that went to make a shawl-the designer. The key writer and the weaver-the second was regarded as the most skilled and got five times the remuneration of the original artist. And in 1921, he earned about 50 to 75 paisa per day.

TAXATION

In 1846, when Maharaja Gulab Singh took over the Kashmir valley, shawl trade was taxed in several ways. First the *keliphams* or raw wool was subjected to tax on entering the Maharaja's territories at Leh. Each loom was counted as a unit of 2 to 3 workmen according to the kind of shawl produced- *jamawar-Hashia-Dor*-and so on. The first duty was levied on a loom at a fixed rate. Previously it was Rs 48 per loom, but the Maharaja reduced it to Rs.37 per loom the second one was on the *shawlbaf* at the rate of Rs 2/-per month. This he had to pay whether he worked or not. The *kharhandars* were pay for the paddy in lumpsum and realize the price in easy instalments from the wages of the *shawlbafe*. In course of time the *kharkhandars* in collusion with government agencies realized the price of the paddy at an enhanced rate from the *shawlbafs* who accepted it without demur. The government immediately seized upon the situation and converted it into a regular source of tax, demanding the higher price realized from the *shawlbafs*, who were now obliged to pay for the paddy at a rate higher than the market price. During Maharaja Gulab Singh and Ranbir Singh's time this tax or *baj* was realized by selling to the *shawlbafs* paddy at Rs 2/- per *kharwar* whereas the market price was only Rs 1.25.

In 1868 A.D. Maharaja Ranbir Singh remitted the tax by 11 *chilkies*, and three years later remitted four *annas* per *kharwar* on the sale of paddy to the weavers. Each weaver had now to pay Rs.2 instead of Rs.225 *chilkies* a *kharwar*. This system continued for ten years but as the demand for shawls in Europe declined, and the *karkhandars* too became poor, the Maharaja in 1876A.D. reduced. The tax from 27 *chilkies* to 10 *chilkies*. Next year *Niliv*. (Sale of paddy at enhanced rates) was totally abolished. Owing to the famine of 1877 and the declining demand for shawls, the shawl weavers were reduced to abject poverty and the Maharaja then abolished the tax altogether and in its place a permit duty of 20 *chilkies* and customs duty of 11 *chilkies* i.e. 31 *chilkies* percent on the value of the shawls sold or



exported were recovered. This too was remitted in 1886 by Maharaja Pratap Singh when he ascended the *gaddi*. There remained customs and *octroi* duties on the shawl wool and shawls, which were Rs.6 to -3 percent; and these were also remitted in 1901 A.D.

WOOLLEN AND COTTON TEXTILES

There could be no better instance of a perfect cottage industry than the manufacture of the woollen products of Kashmir during the period covered by this study (1847-1925). The product, be it plain cloth or a blanket was primarily for the personal uses of the villagers though simple were warm. They consisted of a *pheran* and a pyjama. In winter these were made of *pattu* or woollen homespuns. In 1889-90 the woollen *pheran* cost Rs.4|- and a *pyama* Rs.1|- . Every villager as also the city dweller had a good blanket to keep himself warm.

The manufacture of woollen cloth had been almost universal throughout the valley, and gave employment to the villagers through the long winter months. The mountain sides and downs afforded a rich pasturage to extensive flocks of sheep, whose increase was only limited by the difficulty of providing fodder during the winter, when all vegetation was hid beneath a thick carpet of snow. There were three qualities of wool depending on the colour. The black, which was inferior value, was sold in 1864, at 1 kilogram for one rupee, the grey, which was of middling quality, for one rupee a *killo* and the white fetched a rupee for three-quarters of a *killo*. The weaver's charges in 1870 were 10 to 12 *annes* (British currency) for making up a blanket with seam. The operation of weaving of blanket occupied from three to four days.

The best wool in Kashmir was found in the north where the grasses were good; the best weavers were in the south. The seamless shupiyan blankets were sold according to quality and fineness, and the *khundrang* (natural colour) blankets made at wangam, 12 yards long and 1 ½ yards broad, commanded prices of Rs.24 and Rs.25. The one-seam blanket, which consisted of two breadths sewn together (the two pieces being 1 ½ yards board, with a length of 10 yards), commanded a lower price and used to be sold by weight, 1 seer fetching Rs.2. A good *khudrang* single seam blanket fetched Rs.6 or Rs.7, while a white blanket could be bought for Rs.5 or 5.8. Kashmiri blankets formed a great article of export of India, reaching in 1889-90 to a value of Rs. 7,17,721. A large amount of woollen piece goods exported from Kashmir probably escaped registration, as the Kashmiris all carried down



blankets for their personal use, and these were sold in the Punjab when they set out on their return journey to Kashmir. By 1946, the Srinagar woollen mills was known all over India for its excellent art-manufactures, and the demand for its products could hardly be met, although production increased continuously.

SILK INDUSTRY

One of the outstanding achievements of the state during the period 1846-1925 was the revival and development of the silk industry in Kashmir. Maharaja Gulab Singh attempted to revive the industry and succeeded to some extent. The modern industry, however, dates from the time of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, who in the year 1871 organized sericulture on a large and extensive scale. The industry was converted into a Government monopoly, and at the head of the new department was placed Baba Nilambar Mukerji, M.A., B.L., The chief justice of Srinagar. Four of these houses were built in the Kutahar Pargana, at the villages of Tserpura, Shangas, Naogam and Achabal. Three were likewise built in the bring Pargana, at the villages of Sagam, and Akingam and another on at Sof. Besides these built at various places throughout the valley, wherever the mulberry flourished.

In 1871 the out-turn of silk was 10,080 lbs. The revenue from which amounted to between 8,000 and 10,000 *chilki* rupees; in 1872 the production had increased to 57,600 lbs of dry cocoons, which was one-third of the weight of those freshly spun, besides a considerable quantity of inferior sorts, available for the production of floss silk, and the revenue was calculated to amount to 96,000 *chilki* rupees, after deducting Rs.30,000 for the cost of imported and improved establishment.

In 1889, on the advice of Sir Edward Buck, secretary to the Government of India, it was decided to adopt the past ear system of Microsopical examination. Good seed was imported from Italy and France and an excellent crop of cocoons was obtained. In 1897 the industry was put under the auspices of an expert, Mr.C.B.Walton. the industry continued to make sizeable profits with the import of larger quantities of seed. In 1901, 20 *maunds* of silk-worn eggs were used, which produced some 12,700 mounds of cocoons, roughly valued at rupees 8 to10 lakh. From the year 1913 the state was able to make a clear profit of seven to nine lakhs of rupees a year. By 1920 the net profit had gone up to 25 lakh of rupees a year.

Sericulture had undoubtedly proved a boon to Kashmir, in as much as it was a source of livelihood to about 5,000 labourers daily at the factory and employed an immense number



of persons as silkworm rearers during the rearing season, for which they got a remuneration of over 2 ½ and 5 lakhs of rupees per annum, respectively.

BOAT-MAKING

Boat-making was another old but important industry of Kashmir. Even after the means of transport had been greatly improved, much of the trade as well as the passenger traffic was carried on in boats. The labour involved in boat-making was indeed great. Men intending to make a boat went to the nearby deodar forests and selected a large tree, about 100 feet high and 3 to 4 feet in diameter. After felling, they cut it into two parts lengthwise. Out of each part, they made one plank of the required thickness, say 3 to 4 inches, by axing off all the extra wood on the outside. The planks were then hauled to a river and left in the water for 2 or 3 years to season. These formed the two sides of the boat. Three or four more were used for its flooring and finishing. The actual building of the boat was made on a flat piece of ground from where it could be launched without any danger of strain to its hull. The boats greatly varied in shape and size. There were thus great grain barges, carrying cargoes of 3 to 30 tons state "*parindas*" or fliers propelled by 40 to 50 rowers and little *shikaras*. The houseboats already referred to, were another variety.

CONCLUSION

The economic condition of the valley became no less pathetic. The daily wages of shawl weavers were four *annas*, of which half was taken by the government officials in taxes. Silk industry was progressed during Pratab Singh's rule. Seeds were imported from Italy and France and distributed among the peasants for rearing cocoons. In 1920 A.D., the silk factory produced over one lakh kgs of raw silk cocoons. The silk industry provided employment to a large no. of people in Srinagar and to the numerous peasants who reared silk worms in their homes during their spare time. Thus we see that the people of the state had to face lot of difficulties, but still they progressed and prospered. The foregoing analysis should not, however, convey the impression that the extent of the prosperity and the rate of progress were satisfactory, and that the standard of living of the people of the state as a whole or even of the Kashmir province had reached a sufficiently high level. It would, therefore, be appropriate to describe this entire set of changes during the period from 1885-1925 as the economic transition in the history of Kashmir.



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