

AFGHAN RULE IN KASHMIR

(A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT)

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Abstract:

Afghan rule in Kashmir began with Ahmad Shah Abdali's conquest of Kashmir in 1753. Afghan's exploited the Kashmir's irrespective religion and creed. Kashmiri's were subjected to vigorous taxation. Afghan rule had a devastating impact of Kashmir economy. Owing to exorbitant taxation migrations became common phenomenon. Consequent upon the peasants deserted their lands and crafts. Nevertheless there are certain positives of this rule. The present paper examines the nature of Afghan rule in Kashmir.

Keywords: Afghan, Kashmir, Ahmad Shah Abadali, Peasants, Migration

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Introduction:

The period of Afghan rule over Kashmir extended from 1753 to 1819 A.D. under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Abdali. Once again Kashmir fell from the frying pan into the fire and became subject to the tyrannical rule. Like the Mughal rulers, the Afghans also ruled over Kashmir through their governors and deputy governors. During these 67 years of reign about 28 Afghan governors and deputy-governors ruled over Kashmir. Among them only one governor namely, Raja Sukh Jewanmal was a Hindu and he was first Hindu to be the ruler of Kashmir after over four hundred years and that rest were the Afghans. Of these 14 governors should designs of shaking off central authority and eventually declared themselves independent. But none of them could maintain his independence for long period.

Nature of Afghan Rule in Kashmir:

As Afghan rule is remembered as cruel and tyrant but some of the Afghan governors were excellently law abiding and humane. Some oppressed both the Muslims and the Hindus and Squeezed them like the horse leech. While other, who were examples of wretched bigotry, and caused Shia- Sunni riots on several occasions. Whenever administration became lax internally or there were symptoms of rebellion, the marauding Khakha, Bomba and Gojar hill-tribes, ever on the lookout from the periphery of the valley, swooped down upon the people carrying loot, arson and murder. They left behind political chaos, economic distress and starvation deaths.

The Afghans did not take any interest in the welfare of the people. Since the governors sent from Kabul were always uncertain about their tenure of office owing to the intrigues at Kabul, this explains why they robbed Kashmir of its wealth. Abdullah Khan Ishaq Aqasi, the first Afghan governor of Kashmir, for example, took a crore of rupees with him as *Peshkash* for Ahmad Shah Abdali when the later recalled him to Kabul. This huge amount was forcibly collected from the merchants and peasants of Kashmir only six months of his tenure.

During the Afghan period, the administrative machinery went into degradable conditions. The land was leased out for the purpose of the revenue collections. The tax was so burdened on peasants that they cut down all the fruit growing trees in the villages selling them as fire wood in order to meet the government demand. Within a month the whole valley was denuded of its fruit wealth. Without considerations of caste or creed Haji Karimdad Khan

imposed numerous unjust and killing taxes which resulted in complete impoverishment of the people. For instance, he imposed 1. *Zar-i- Niaz* or presentation Tax, on mansabdars and Jagirdars; 2. *Zar-i- Ashkhas* or property tax, on middle class gentry; 3. *Zar-i-hubub* or grain tax, on cultivators. 4. *Zar-i-Dudak* or religious tax, on the Hindus. Besides, he also established the department of Dagh-shawl to regulate the Shawl trade. Under this department heavy tax was imposed on the shawl trade which later on became such a heavy burden on the poor shawl weavers that they preferred death to weaver's profession. Although most part of the revenue was drained away to Kabul and a very little was spent on the local developments in Kashmir. The natural consequence of such a policy was that the famines became visitors to Kashmir which in turn also resulted in the decrease of population.

The Afghan governors of Kashmir and their officers caused harassment to the people of Kashmir by various devices. Amir Khan Jawan Sher at once instituted a reign of terror for the Sunnis. Many leading Kashmiri nobles were apprehended, tried and killed on flimsy charges .During Haji Karim Dad Khan's seven years of rule ,untold cruelties were perpetrated on the people .For the sheer pleasure of killing, numberless Kashmiris were drowned in the Dal Lake. Azad Khan was awful. Ferocious and bad tempered in his cruelties surpassed his father. Every day he would order one or two persons to be killed for no fault. Atta Mohammad Khan Alkozai, during his last years of his reign turned into a ferocious libertine. He molested the beautiful girls in order to satisfy his carnal madness and many parents were compelled to shave the heads of their daughters rather than allow them to be molested and degraded.

During the Afghan period, people were not allowed to wear arms and a strict vigil was kept on them by a good number of spies employed for the purposes. The local chiefs were suppressed and a strong force of Afghans kept within the city walls and always ready to put down any revolt. It is worth remembering that during the governorship of Azad Khan, the local population under the leadership of Maluk Khan rose against him, but they could not succeed in overthrowing him.

Conclusion:

Afghan rule in Kashmir was exploitative in character. The exorbitant taxation had a devastating impact on Kashmir economy. Famines and epidemics were common phenomenon of this period. As result people migrated to plains in order to escape the oppression and exploitation. Afghan state in Kashmir was atypical medieval state, guided wealth. Afghan governors drained the wealth of Kashmir. It is important to note that despite misrule and tyranny during the Afghan period, Shawl industry of Kashmir flourished. During this period, the Shawls had an increasing demand in India and Europe.

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