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## **The Kashmiri Shawl** (in perspective of Mughals, Afghans, Sikhs & Dogras's regime in Kashmir)

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### **Abstract:**

Kashmir is renowned throughout the world for its beauty and enchanting crafts. For the last so many centuries, the Kashmir has been fostering its hand weaving industries, which have a rich craft tradition. The shawl weaving is a magnificent art industry of Kashmir that plays a significant role in the economic prosperity of the State. This art industry faced many periods of its ruin and revival in different regimes. The aim of this article is to highlight Kashmiri shawl's production and characteristic in perspective of four major periods of its history.

Kashmir is a land of beauty and its name evokes images of dream landscape and rich cultural traditions. It is a storehouse of exquisite work of art fostered by people renowned for elegant taste and artistic faculty like the Japanese. The Kashmiris has won great reputation as artisan and were celebrated in the old days for their skill in art manufacturing for which Kashmir is celebrated throughout the world, is that of the light, warm, and elegant article of dress, which from its native appellation, is known as "Shawl".

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The most striking fact about the history of Kashmir is that its people rose to great height of art, culture and economic prosperity primarily when the impulses came from outside rather than from within. The Kashmiri shawl developed during three hundred years of Kashmir's history through four different periods of foreign political rule, during said periods Kashmir was ruled successively By the Mughals, the Afghans, the Sikhs and the Dogras.(1)

#### **The Origin of the Kashmir Shawl:**

The shoulder mantle of shawl had been in existence in a variety of forms from the most ancient times serving as a staple and protective garment not only the rich and noble but also and above all for the common people.

In ancient Buddhist literature, the shawl can be found among recorded inventories of woolen textiles and its manufacture appears to have been a cottage industry in Kashmir as early as the elementally century.(2) The shawl industry in Kashmir may be said to be as old as the hills. It is stated to have flourished in the days of the Kuris and Pandus. It was a prosperous industry in the days of the Roman Empire, when the proudest beauties at the court of the Caesars wore Kashmiri shawls. In the Asoka's time, we find the shawl mentioned in Buddhistic work as the Kashmiri shawl. But thereafter for a long period this art was dead.(3)

In 14th century, a Persian saint named Syed Ali Hamadani (R.A) visited Kashmir along with seven hundred Muslims in which many experts of handicrafts were came here to re-establish this precious art with new techniques later on the emperor of Kashmir Sultan Bud Shah played a vital role for the promotion of this art during his regime. He brought many experts from Central Asia to introduce modern techniques in the field of handicrafts. In 16th century, the shawl industry received an impetus through the endeavors of Naghz Beg, an artist by nature who introduced the new texture of the shawl.(4)

The shawl industry, which had nearly died out due to practical upheavals, owes its revival to a remarkable foreigner Naghz Beg, a native of Khokand, who came to Kashmir in 1540 A.D. as a cook of Mirza Haider Daughat. Naghz Beg got a piece of

1x1/2 square yards pashmina and presented it to his master who was extremely pleased with it.(5)

A recently found document provides new evidence suggesting that indeed it may have been during either the fifteenth or sixteenth century that the industry first began this document was written by the well-known shawl merchant of nineteenth century in Kashmir. Haji Mukhtar Shah whose ancestors began working in the shawl trade in the seventeenth century was pain fully struck by its sudden demise during the 1870 A.D.(6)

The shawls industry sustained its journey but it was not until the Mughal's conquest of Kashmir in 1586 that the Kashmir shawl industry realized its full potential.

#### **The Classes and production method of Kashmiri Shawls:**

There are two principal classes of shawls namely 'Amalikar' and 'Tili' or 'Kani'. The design of the Amalikar is worked in almost imperceptible stitches covering the whole ground in an elaborate pattern. The production of an Amalikar shawl may involve a year's labour and be sufficient to make a fine choga. Said Baba, Alias and Ali Baba invented this later in the time of Azad Khan, the Afghan governor of Kashmir from 1783 to 1785. A.D. Kani or loom-woven shawl woven in small segments which are sewn together with such precision and neat less that the sewing is quite imperceptible.(7)

The prettiest Kashmiri shawls are produced by three methods: by embroidering upon plain foundation cloth; by weaving a pattern as an integral part of the foundation cloth; subsequently embellishing it with embroidery.(8)

#### **The Shawls made of Kelphamb:**

The beauties of shawl depend as much on the brilliancy and disability of its unrivalled colours and the material of shawl as one of the quality of its workmanship. The shawl is made of fine, soft, flossy, under fur called Tosh or Kel-phamb or pashm (fine wool) of the kel of goats also called the Himalayan ibex or the Ladakhi goat.(9) The best shawls are made from the very fine wool underlying the long hairs of the Tibetan goat, which are woven into a delicate material called pashmina in which the shawl patterns are worked.(10)

This finest Pashm of best quality is also brought from Chinese Turkistan from the neighborhood of Ush-Turfan.

### **The Shawl industry during its Historical Periods in Kashmir:**

#### **1- Mughal Period:**

In the Mughals Period, Emperor Akbar brought many weavers from the city of Andizhan, Easter Turkestan (about 750 km north of Kashmir) down to Kashmir.

In days of the Mughal emperors, the art of shawl weaving attained to such excellence that a shawl of one and half-square yards in dimension could be produced which could pass twisted through a finger ring.(11)

Akbar improved the shawl department by making a visual improvement to the tus shawl. Tus was extremely goat's wool; which came from the wild ibex whose nature colour was brown or white.(12)

The price of different shawls ranged between rupees two hundred of twelve hundred each in the Mughals Period. Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzab Alamgir were all extremely found of shawls and also patronized and subsidized the shawl weaving industry.(13)

A trade of shawl with India during the Mughals period was carried out through the agency of the government. Most of the shawl for instance were taken by officials and sent to Delhi and Agra where some were presented to the Emperor and the rest sold to the nobility. The Mughal emperors during their many visits were frequently followed by a horde of traders from Hindustan who purchased shawls and other artistic wares and sold them at a profit in the chief cities of India. During Mughal period, the Kashmiri arts and crafts had reached a level of workmanship because Mughals encouraged the industry in every possible way.(14)

As the Mughal kingdom came under collapse and Kashmir came under the Afghan rule, the shawl trade began to focus increasingly on the west, while the Indian market fell into decline. In spite of this change the government of Hyderabad in the Deccan continued to be a rich out let for the Kashmiri shawl where it remained the conventional dress of the nobles at court.

**2- Afghan Period:**

The afghan invasion in 1753A.D by Ahmed Shah Abdali put an end to the Mughals rule of Kashmir. Under the rule of Afghans, the country was reduced to the lowest depths of penury and degradation a slavery lasting for sixty-seven-years. The Afghan's cruelty also threatened the life and property of all foreigners who had been residing in Kashmir. About ninety firms established by Hindu businessmen were closed down as their owners returned to their homeland, while nearly half the population of Kashmir left the terror stricken land permanently.

The Afghan rule that succeeded the Mughal domination in Kashmir did not offer any encouragement what so ever to this industry, which in turn, would have rendered immense economic benefits to the people of Kashmir and also been a viable source of income to the rulers. Afghans subjected the producers of handicrafts to heavy taxation. Thus, adoption of a step motherly attitude towards the development of handicrafts industry through imposition of heavy taxes affected the growth and export potentials of industry.(15)

The darkest period in Kashmir's history occurred during the regime of the Afghan governor Haji Dad Khan (1776-1783A.D). He imposed a heavy tax on the shawl weaving trade, and began the system of dagshawl or excise tax on shawls, which later became such a burden for the poor shawl weavers that they even preferred death to the weaver's professional.(16)

During the Afghan days a very fine piece sold at forty rupees the first cost but the value of this commodity may be largely enhanced by the introduction of flowered work and when you are informed that the sum of one hundred rupees is occasionally given for a shawl to the weaver in which the half amount may be fairly ascribed to the ornaments.(17)

**3- Sikh Period:**

Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780 -1839A.D) was the founder of the Sikh Empire, which ruled the northwest Indian subcontinent in the early half of the 19th century. During this era of colorful history, a variety of complex and enigmatic patterns emerged, some purely geometric, others symbolic, which have long eluded textiles experts. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's takeover of Kashmir in

1819A.D had an extraordinary impact on the fashion of the legendary Kashmir shawl, giving rise to a major artistic expression in the subcontinent. In contrast with the Afghan period the shawl in Sikh period with its baldly sweeping curves, was more grandiose in design than ever before. It was a period of creativity unprecedented in the history of Kashmir, perhaps triggered by Ranjit Singh's conquest of Kashmir in 1819 A.D which had united it with the rest of the Punjab where his court was renowned for its magnificence.(18) The officers under the Maharaja were careful to keep an agent in Kashmir to look after the shawls, which were woven each year. This was obviously necessary to assure that the goods might be delivered to the Sikhs.(19)

Under the Sikh rule, the trade was in a flourishing condition. A European William Moorcroft, who visited Kashmir in 1822 A.D said that the whole value of shawl goods manufactured in Kashmir may be estimated at about thirty five lakhs of Rupees per annum. Divan Kirpa Ram was Governor in 1827 A.D and then the trade was in a most prosperous condition, but a terrible famine visited the land in Col. Mian Singh's time in 1834A.D, which gave a crushing blow to its manufactures.(20) And the industry began to decline when they sustained the dagshawl tax system(21) perhaps not in name but in practice if only to support their military exploits.

#### **4- Dogra Period:**

During the Dogra rule, the handicrafts industry was on the verge of extinction through Maharaja Ghulab Singh, the founder of Dogra rule. He was a great patron of arts and crafts; his successors did not encourage the development of handicrafts industry in Kashmir. Most of the crafts like papier-mâché and shawls were in decadent condition(22) In the treaty of 1846A.D (between Kashmir Darbar and East India Company, it was one of the items that every year Rs. 8000 worth of shawls and rumals the Darbar would have to send to the British sovereign of India, and this is done ever up to this day.(23)

With the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839A.D, the Punjab fell into a state of anarchy. By 1844A.D many foreign officers and residents, previously engaged in the services of the Maharaja, had wisely left the area for fear of losing broth life and property. It was

not until the British after a fierce battle against the Sikhs, was given the rule of the Kingdom of Kashmir by the British under the Treaty of Lahore in 1846A.D. When Maharaja Ghulab Singh became the ruler in 1846A.D, the shawl trade began to revive and commenced one of its most glorious epochs.(24)

In the 1860 A.D a new type of shawl was created which used a different weaving technique from the interlocked Kani shawls named Dorukha shawl that enjoyed a tremendous success during the later part of the nineteenth century.(25)

The best shawls ever made in Kashmir were manufactured in the time of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, between the years, 1865-1872 A.D. that were in very fine texture and of the most elaborate and graceful patterns of a purely Eastern style of decoration.(26) In this period, several houses represented French trade and their annual export, chiefly of shawls averaged in value it is said four lakhs of Rupees.

In the dogra regime, the shawl department Daghshawl, was re-organized by Maharaja Ghulab Singh. Before the 4th decade of 20th century, the duty on shawl was levied according to the number made and stamped in the years at the rate of 3 annas in the rupee. For new shops, the Maharaja charged only half the tax for the first few years.(27) He also introduced certain reforms improvements of workmen's wages and freedom to change their masters.

As there have been many periods of ruin and revival of this industry shown in the history, at present its time to re-boost this precious kind of art by providing peaceful environment and also paying special attention towards this artistic industry, so that these work of art will get its lost demand all over the world.

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