



## Shawl Industry and its Impact on the Socio-economic Condition of Jammu and Kashmir

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**ABSTRACT:** Shawl industry is one of the biggest industries of Jammu and Kashmir and is said to be “as old as the hills of Kashmir”. It has made Kashmir very famous in India and has been in great demand in Iran, Afghanistan and Turkistan, Russia. Europe has been most popular and high level market destination of shawl industry of Kashmir as wealthy sections of society in Europe and Central Asia had good interest in it. However the industry got a set blow which led in the decline of the socio-economic development of Jammu and Kashmir. The present study is the historical analysis of Shawl Industry of Jammu and Kashmir, giving an over view about its evolutionary history, impact and its decline in Jammu and Kashmir.

**Keywords:** Shawl, Kashmir, shawl baffs, Karkhandars, weavers, Pashmina.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Shawl industry is one of the biggest industries of Jammu and Kashmir quite famous in India and abroad too. The countries like Iran, Afghanistan and Turkistan, Russia and also in Europe have been fond of Kashmiri Shawls across the ages. This embroidered dress material is woven with fine wool and celebrated with great reputation throughout the centuries. These beautiful hand-woven products formed the dress of kings, queens nobility etc. The shawl was most popular among the wealthy sections of society in Europe and Central Asia. Those shawls were bestowed as robes of honor by the emperors and kings within their political and religious practices [1]. Kashmiri shawl woven during the sixteenth and eighteenth century was made Central Asian goat fleece, silk and other materials. The merchants brought the goat hair from Leh in Ladakh. After that the finished shawls were sent to Central Asia, China and some to Russia and Ottoman Empire [2]. This type of pushm was also imported from Chinese Turkistan, from the neighborhood of Ush Tafroon. The pushm brought from Tafran was taken from goats in Than Shan mountains and was brought to Tafran and Ush Tafran, from there it comes by caravans by Kashgar, Yarkand and Leh route. The trade of shawl wool was confined to the trading community known as Tibet Baqals [3]. The availability of pushm in large quantities was due to the grassy mountains on which large flocks of sheep and goat were kept by nomads [4]. During seventeenth and eighteenth century the industry disrupted due to the heavy tax levied on it by Afghans and Sikhs [5]. Napoleon Bonaparte, brought the first Kashmiri shawl, when he was engaged in Egyptian campaign, presented it to Empress Josephine and then Kashmiri shawl became famous in Paris [6]. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri shawl was used as wedding gift in France and Britain. In the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri shawl had a great competition with the Iranian shawl woven in Kerman, Mashad and Yazad [7]. Many attempts were made at Agra, Lahore, Patna and Amritsar to produce the copy of Kashmiri shawl, but these shawls made other than Kashmir did not compete with the Shawl made in Kashmir. The real Kashmiri shawl was made of fine wool (*pushm*) obtained from the sheep of Kashmir, Ladakh Tibet and Central Asia. The pushm was brought to Kashmir in a raw state, spun into threads of different degree of fineness by the women on wheels [8]. Among these woven shawls some were embroidered which costs more than 100 pounds [9]. Made with good quality pushm the shawl is said to pass through finger ring. In France the groom's gift to his bride was the fine Kashmiri shawl. Among the shawls exported from Kashmir, about 80% were exported to France, 10% to United States, 5% to Italy, 25 to Russia and 1% to Great Britain and Germany [10].

The shawls made in Kashmir were of two types, loom or *kani* [11] and handmade or *Amlikar* [12]. In the loom system a 'Kardar' was shawl manufacturer, who engaged 20-300 work men known as *shawlbafs* or *shagirds* [13]. The shawl wool was woven by the women, the wives of shawl *sadabafs*, merchants and shopkeepers. Then it was dyed into yarn. The fine shawl was completed by the labour of three men and at least in one year. Disrupted by

Afghans and Sikhs the shawl trade began review during the reign of Maharaja Gulab Singh. From 1846-1869, the income from the shawl industry to the state was on an average 7 lakh rupees per annum [14]. The best ever shawl produced in Kashmir was made during the time of Maharaja Ranbir Singh between the years 1865 to 1872. Their texture was of the finest, their colour soft and their patterns of eastern style. The weavers get little benefit from it and the profits went to the merchants. They become so rich that they put milk instead of water in their *hookas* (an earthen or iron pot with long pipe used for smoking). During this time twenty seven thousand people were engaged in shawl making [15]. During Maharaja Ranbir Singh's time the export of shawl valued Rs 28 lakhs per annum [16]. Shawl trade was controlled by master workman. There were 20-30 *shawlbafs* who worked under master workman. At the end of the month the account was taken to the *kardar* to see the work performed by each member during the month. After that he draws the pay for each member according to the amount of work done [17]. There were about 100 *kardars* in the valley, which either lived in Srinagar or Islamabad. But the houses in which they (shawl-bafa) work were in Sopur or Pampur [18]. These *shawl bafs* were paid by *kardars* from 3-5 *Chilkee* rupees per month, inclusive of amount deducted by govt. for *shali*, [19] sold to them. Their condition was very dismal, because the sum paid to them after hard work was not enough according to the work done by them through the month and also was not enough to support their families. The average earning of *shawl-baf* was three pence a day [20].

In the handmade system the workman or (*shawlbaf*) made plain *pushm* from the spun *pushm*. After that the needle work upon the plain push was done with colored threads by a workman known as *rafugar*. The *shawlbafs* were neither allowed to leave the valley nor to relinquish their employment. On the other hand the condition of *rafugar* was slightly better, as they were permitted to change their profession if they wish. These classes were allowed to buy *pushmina* from bazaar and to manufacture the shawls in their houses, but were never allowed to sell these manufactured shawls to the merchants themselves [21]. The shawl manufacture was under the control of the department known as *Dagshali*. The head of the department was known as *darogha*, whose office was in the Srinagar. In this office there were 200 *Pandits* employed under his supervision [22]. The shawl was taxed at many stages before it was sold out. *Pashmina* was first stamped by *Dagshali* department, on which the tax of 10 *chilkee* rupees was levied for two yards; the second tax was 18 *chilkee* rupees on four yards. The *Pandits* were employed were to check that no *pushm* was sold without paying tax by *shawlbaf*. After the completion of shawl it was again taken to the *dagshali* and the owner received the certificate of paid taxes [23]. The *karkandar* [24] have to pay the tax for each *shawlbaf* at the end of year. A weaver earns only seven to eight *chilkee* rupees per month, out of which five to six rupees was paid as tax and he was left with only two to three rupees. They (shawl weavers) have to pay the taxes like '*baj*' and '*nazrana*' [25]. The shawls woven were sold at different prices according to the quality of the woven shawl. Ordinary shawl was sold for the price ranging between Rs. 50 and Rs. 2000, according to the quality of material and richness of embroidery. The best hand-worked shawl costs about one fifth higher than loom-shawl [26].

## II. DECLINE OF SHAWL INDUSTRY

The biggest ever industry of the valley received death blow and towards the closing years of 19<sup>th</sup> century the industry was almost in declining state. There were many causes responsible for the decline of the industry. First was the state monopoly over the shawl trade. The officers of the department of *dagshali* often become the source of oppression for the weavers. The great deal of tyrannies caused by the misrule of the officials of the department, forced the weavers to migrate to the Punjab and other places. But because of high mountain passes and the restrictions imposed by the government on the migration often made it difficult. But sometimes they managed to escape by bribing the officials of the state, while they often left their children's and wives in Kashmir to die. This forced the weavers to left their profession [27]. Second was the taxation policy of the govt. Tax was imposed on the wool when it entered the valley. Also the *Karkhandars* was subjected to pay tax for each workman in his employee. He was also taxed at various stages of the process according to the value of the fabric and also merchant was taxed before he could export the goods [28]. Third was Franco-German in 1870, by which the industry received a death blow. The heavy war indemnity paid by France had spared a little cash for the purchase of shawls, and after wards by the change of fashion which expelled these fabrics from France and America [29]. According to the Sufi "the excitement with which the shawlbafts (shawl weaver) watched the fate of France in that struggle, bursting into tears and loud lamentations when the news of Germans victory reached him" [30]. The Franco-German war and the famine of 1877 forced the weavers either to migrate or to change their occupation. The Maharaja coped the famine and advanced a million rupees to shawl manufacturers, but to no avail, and the weavers either migrated to Punjab and other places or started making shawls of inferior quality [31]. During the famine the poll tax on the weavers was exacted for the reason as during the wide spread misery, they were not able to pay, but as a substitute toll tax and other imposts on the weavers was imposed and the export duty on the shawls was raised up to 25%.

The decline of shawl trade forced the weavers to leave their profession and with the passage of time they forget their old art and good number of them left the valley for Lahore, Amritsar and Ludhiana. The last blow was given by Paisley made shawls, when an English man named Kerr started to manufacture mill mad shawls in the town of Paisley, which were the copies of those made in Kashmir [32]. Those made in Paisley were of low cost than the shawls made in Kashmir which ultimately decreased the demand of those Kashmir made shawls.

### III. CONCLUSION

The Shawl Industry has been one of the significant and finest industries of Jammu and Kashmir contributing in the economic development of the State. The industry plays has a prominent role in the state and abroad too in giving a special status to the state. The fibre and the embroidery of the Kashmir shawls is an epitome in itself and owe a special status across the world. However the study reveals that the industry received a death blow due to certain reasons and so bitterly was the socio economic development of Jammu and Kashmir affected. The state monopoly over the shawl trade, Forced weaving, Tax imposition on the wool , Franco-German in 1870 and the last blow of Paisley by making the copies of Kashmiri Shawls made the industry to decline terribly as Paisley Shawls were relatively cheap and thereby leading to the downfall of the Jammu Kashmir Shawl Industry.

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- [4]. Younghusband, *Kashmir*, Create space Independent Publishing Platform Publication, 2017, p.42.
- [5]. Husanain F. M, *Historic Kashmir*, Gulshan publication, Srinagar, 2002, pp. 182-183.
- [6]. In 1796 A.D Abdulla Khan was the Afghan governor of Kashmir who presented an orange colour shawl to Sayyid Ahmad; a blind man came from Baghdad as a visitor to Kashmir. Sayyid Ahmad presented it to the Khedive in Egypt, who presented it to the Napoleon, who was the then engaged in Egyptian Campaign (1798-1801), who further passed it to the Empress Josephine. Napoleon also presented to his second wife Marie-Louise 17 Kashmiri shawls as Gift. Sufi G. M. D, *op.cit*, p.556.
- [7]. Michelle Masikiell, Consuming Kashmiri shawls and Emperors 1500-2000, *Journal of World history*, Vol. 13, No. 1, p.33.
- [8]. Ishaq Khan, *op.cit*, p.56.
- [9]. The shawl was woven at such a degree of fineness that it remains in its original shape for many years without losing its beauty. Even after washing the shawl became brighter in colour and more plaint than when new. Sufi G. M. D, *op.cit*, p.562.
- [10]. *Ibid*, pp.566-67.
- [11]. This type of shawl was woven into small segments which were sewn together with such exactness and care that the needle work was quite hardly noticeable, another type was *Amlikar* in which minute needle work was done on plain *pashmina* with different patterns. Anand Koul, *op.cit*, p.44.
- [12]. Amlikar shawl was invented by a Kashmiri Saida Baba Ilias in the time of Azad khan (an Afghan Governor) who remained in the post from 1783-1785 A.D. *Ibid*, p.46.
- [13]. Robert Thorpe (E & R), F. M. Husanain, *Kashmir Misgovernment*, p.42, Quarter Master General, Gazetteer of Kashmir and *Ladakh*, Delhi, 1890, p.69, see also Arthur Brinckman, Robert Throp, *Kashmir Oppressed*, Weis publ, Srinagar, 1983, p.96.
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- [16]. *Ibid*.
- [17]. Robert Thrope, *Kashmir Misgovernment*, Longmans, Green, and Co. 1970, pp.42-43.
- [18]. *Ibid*, p.57, Quarter Master General, *Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh*, p.70.
- [19]. The sale of rice was the state monopoly. During the time of Maharaja Ranbir Singh 12,35,358 Kharwars (about 25,00,000 maunds) were stored yearly, and about 4 lakh Kharwars were sold to shawl weavers of Srinagar at the rate of Rs 2 (Chilkee) per Kharwar. Ishaq Khan, *op.cit*, p.57, Robert Thrope, *op.cit*, p.57.
- [20]. Quarter Master General, *Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh*, p.70.
- [21]. *Ibid*, Bates C. E, *Gazetteer*, p. 54.
- [22]. *ibid*, Robert Thrope, *op.cit*, p.43.
- [23]. Bates C. E, *op.cit*, p.53. Quarter Master General, Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh, p.73.
- [24]. Each karkhandar was taxed for the each shawl baf in his employee. Up to the Dec. 1867, the annual tax levied on each karkhandar for each shawl baf he employees was 47-48 Chilkee rupees. From Dec. 1867 deduction of Rs 11 was made, and each Karkhandar have to pay Rs 36-37. Robert Thrope, *op.cit*, p.43.

- [25]. Ishaq Khan, *op.cit*, p.59.
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- [28]. No.86, Foreign Dept, K. W Secret E, March 1883, NAI, p.15 see also Ishaq Khan, p.63.
- [29]. *Ibid*, Perace Gervis, *This is Kashmir*, Universal publ, Delhi, 1974, p. 136 see also Lawrence, *Valley*, p.375.
- [30]. Sufi G. M. D, *op.cit*, p.568.
- [31]. A good number of weavers engaged themselves in carpet industry, but the industry was not big enough to provide the employment to all the persons who left their profession. Some of them engaged in weaving *Alwands* or *plain pashmina* or *Jamwars* for Persian market and these products were not exported. But large number of the weavers remained unemployed who took the agriculture, but they could not prove themselves fair laborers, because of their weakness and they used to work in the village looms on a wage of 1½ annas per diem. Lawrence W. R, *Valley*, p.377, M. S Khan, *the History of Modern Kashmir*, Gulshan Books, Srinagar, 2006, p.34, see also Perace Gervis, *This is Kashmir*, p.136.
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