

# Shawl Trade in Kashmir during the Mughal Period

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**“Luxurious Kashmiri shawl fabric was wound as men’s turbans in Egypt, stitched into wealthy Iranian women’s jackets, prized for men’s coats in Turkestan, worn as sashes in Tibet, and gifted to both “dancing girls” and male nobles from Delhi to Istanbul.”<sup>1</sup>**

## Abstract

*The shawl industry in Kashmir is of significant antiquity. It was famous throughout the world for its peculiar texture, lightness, warmth and softness. No handicraft article of Kashmir has ever been in fame as the shawl throughout the world. The shawl trade was much important for the economies of Kashmir, Ladakh, Northern India and other trans-Himalayan countries who were directly or indirectly involved in it. It was the main article of Kashmir Export trade and this industry generated chief means of income for the people as the Valley produced little cotton, silk and other textile goods during the Mughal period. The shawl industry was mainly dependent on the wool imported chiefly from Ladakh and also from other surrounding regions. The present work here is intended to study the shawl as an article of trade and to examine the state approach with relation to the development of shawl industry in the Kashmir Subah during the Mughal period.*

**Key Words:** Mughal, Kashmir, Industry, Trade, Export, Shawl, Wool, Merchants

## Introduction

Among all the handcraft products manufactured in Kashmir, shawl was the most important. Although being a remote antiquity, shawl industry came into eminence during the period of Sultan Zain-ul Abidin.<sup>2</sup> According to Pandit Anand Koul, “Zain-ul Abidin turned Kashmir into a smiling garden of industries, inculcating in the hearts of the people conceptions of labour and life, also implanting in their minds the germs of real progress. He introduced correct measures and weights and made artisans and traders take solemn oath [to be honest]... He thus promoted commercial morality and integrity and industrial righteousness –qualities which constitute the backbone of a people’s credit and reputation... It was through these virtues that the Kashmiris successfully carried on their shawl trade of half a crore

<sup>1</sup> Michelle Maskiell, ‘Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500-2000’, *Journal of World History*, vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring, 2002), pp. 27-65.

<sup>2</sup> Shrivara, *Jainarajatarangini*, transl. by Jogesh Chunder Dutt, *Kings of Kashmira*, Calcutta, vol. III, p. 151.

of rupees annually with distant corners of the globe at a period when Kashmir was an isolated country and communications with the outside world were very difficult.”<sup>3</sup>

The shawl industry was a major source of revenue to the government and we find the Mughals even before their occupation of the valley demanded that this industry be made a state property. Nonetheless, we find that the Mughal period led to a greater commercialization of the shawl industry and to its reorganization.<sup>4</sup> The shawls were manufactured in the *Karkhanas* (workshops). Around 120,000 artisans were employed in more than 40,000 textile looms in Srinagar for the manufacturing process during the Mughal period.<sup>5</sup> To quote Bernier:

“What may be considered peculiar to Kachemire [Kashmir], and the staple commodity, that which particularly promotes the trade of the country and fills it with wealth, is the prodigious quantity of shawls which they manufacture, and which gives occupation even to the little children.”<sup>6</sup>

Shawl was prepared from a special kind of wool imported from Ladakh which served as a transit point between the wool producing regions, i.e., Rodokh and Chan-than, and wool consuming region, i.e., Kashmir.<sup>7</sup> Shawl wool was exported only to Kashmir from Ladakh from a very remote period according to ancient customs and engagements, and all attempts to convey it to other countries were punished by confiscation.<sup>8</sup> Wool was also imported from Yarkand, Kashghar and Central Turkistan.<sup>9</sup> During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, around eight hundred loads of wool were annually exported to Kashmir.<sup>10</sup>

The complex structure of the shawl industry in Kashmir largely depended on a network of middlemen (like *bakals*, *pashm faroshes*, *muqeems*, etc.) and their role in the collection of wool from the distant regions was relatively significant. The caravans of Kashmiri merchants travelled every year from mountain to mountain to collect the fine wool (two kinds of wool, i.e., *tous* and *pashm*) with which shawls were manufactured.<sup>11</sup> The agents or middlemen of the Kashmiri merchants who were employed by them in Ladakh collected the wool there. During the summer months (May, June, July and August), thousands of men or labourers were employed by merchants to transport this wool from Ladakh to Kashmir where it was spun into the famous Kashmiri shawl.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Pandit Anand Koul, *Geography of the Jammu and Kashmir State*, Calcutta, second edition, revised, 1925, p 37.

<sup>4</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, transl. by H. Blochmann, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1873, vol. I, pp. 91-92. See also Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, Ali Mohammad & Sons, Srinagar, 1959, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1974, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England*, vol. II, p. 20; A. I. Chicherov, *Indian Economic Development in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Outline History of Crafts & Trade*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971, pp. 216-17.

<sup>6</sup> Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, translated on the basis of Irvine Block's version and annotated by Archibald Constable, 1891, second edition revised by Vincent A. Smith, Oxford University Press, London, 1916, p. 402.

<sup>7</sup> William Moorcroft and George Trebeck, *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Panjab; in Ladakh and Kashmir; in Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz, and Bokhara, 1819-1825*, John Murray, London, 1841, vol. I, p. 346-47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>9</sup> Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, pp. 245-46; Abdul Majid Mattoo, 'Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, pp. 419-20, 425-27.

<sup>12</sup> Ippolito Desideri, *An Account of Tibet: The Travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, 1712-1727*, ed. by Filippo De Filippi, 1931, George Routledge & Sons Ltd., London, revised edition, 1937, p. 73.

Kashmiri merchants received orders from the Indian merchants for producing various kinds of shawls.<sup>13</sup> The use of Kashmir shawls spread from court circles to the business class as well. We learn from Thevenot that although shawls were manufactured in several different colours, the *Banias* or traders almost always *feuille-morte*, or “dead-leaf” colour, corresponding certainly to *khudrang*.<sup>14</sup>

As it had become a craze with every Mughal noble to have a fine shawl of Kashmir, which was considered a symbol of prestige,<sup>15</sup> shawls received much demand and hence were exported to every corner of the Mughal empire<sup>16</sup> and also outside the Mughal frontiers.<sup>17</sup> A large quantity of Kashmiri shawls was purchased by the Mughal emperors and nobility and the *subahdars* often sent these shawls as presents to their patrons.<sup>18</sup>

Shawls were sent by the Mughal emperors as a token of respect to the foreign rulers.<sup>19</sup> Substantial number of shawls were sent to the rulers of Iran, Rome and Egypt, and also to the rulers of Golconda and Bijapur.<sup>20</sup> We find numerous references in *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* and other sources that shawls were also bestowed by the Mughal emperors as *khilat* (robes of honour) on the nobles, courtiers, etc. as a mark of admiration.<sup>21</sup> The Mughals and the Indians, both men and women, wore the Kashmiri shawls round their heads during the winters. The shawls made for the *Umaras* (*Omrahs*) priced one hundred and fifty rupees.<sup>22</sup>

Shawl industry was a state monopoly under the Mughal rule.<sup>23</sup> Kashmiri shawls were used as a luxury and were greatly consumed by the Mughal nobility and aristocracy.<sup>24</sup> Manucci says that a great

<sup>13</sup> *Dasturul-Amal-i-Asar-i-Alamgiri*, Add. 6599, British Museum, Rotograph No. 53, in CAS, Deptt. Of History, AMU, Aligarh, ff. 70-71; Cf. Farzana Ashfaque, ‘Shawl and Carpet Industry in Kashmir under the Mughals’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 70 (2009-2010), pp. 285-296.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Janet Rizvi and Monisha Ahmed, *Pashmina: The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond*, Marg Publications, Mumbai, 2009, p. 163.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 402-03.

<sup>16</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, vol. II, p. 353.

<sup>17</sup> Sujan Rai Bhandari, *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, ed. M. Zafar Hasan, Delhi, 1918, pp. 80-83.

<sup>18</sup> Shah Nawaz Khan and Abdul Hayy, *Maasir-ul Umara*, transl. by H. Beveridge, revised, annotated and completed by Baini Prashad, vol. I, p. 715; Abdul Majid Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals 1586-1752 A.D.*, Golden Horde Enterprises, Srinagar, 1988, p. 220.

<sup>19</sup> Abdul Majid Mattoo, ‘Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

<sup>20</sup> Inayat Khan, *Shah Jahan Nama: An Abridged History of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, Compiled by His Librarian, (1657-58 A.D.)*, transl. by A. R. Fuller, edited and Completed by W. F. Begley and Z. A. Desai, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990, p. 500; D. Pant, *The Commercial Policy of the Mughals*, D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., Bombay, 1930, p. 206; Abdul Ahad, *Kashmir to Frankfurt: A Study of Arts and Crafts*, Rima Publishing House, Delhi, 1987, p. 11; A. M. Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, p. 220.

<sup>21</sup> See Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, transl. Alexander Rogers, Low Price Publications, Delhi, rep. 2006, 2 vols. See also Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, M. C. Sarkar & Sons, Calcutta, 1920, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Other shawls were sold for just more than fifty rupees. Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, p. 403.

<sup>23</sup> Abul Fazl, *Akbar Nama*, vol. III, ed. by Agha Ahmad Ali and Maulavi Abdur Rahim, Bibliotheca Indica, 3 vols., transl. by H. Beveridge, Asiatic Society of Bengal, vol. III, p. 527; Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhabu-ut-Tawarikh*, transl. by Wolsley Haig, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1925, reprinted, 1973, New Delhi, vol. II, p. 363.

<sup>24</sup> Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Padshah Nama*, transl. by Hamid Afaq Siddiqi, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, Delhi, 1910, vol. II, pp. 163-64; Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, vol. I, pp. 90-92; A. M. Mattoo, ‘Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

deal of fine linen [shawl] cloth which is made in Kashmir is used by the nobles.<sup>25</sup> The Mughal imperial court was the main customer of the Kashmiri shawls, and large transactions were carried on there.

Shawls were also exported to Agra, Lahore, Ahmedabad and Gujarat.<sup>26</sup> Kashmiri merchants also exported these shawls to Lhasa (capital of Central Tibet), Nepal, Bhutan and Kathmandu.<sup>27</sup> There was well established export of shawl-goods from Kashmir to Iran during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> From the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, Kashmir started to gain market in the European countries.<sup>29</sup> Later, the Kashmiri shawls also received great demand from the Central Asian and Russian markets.<sup>30</sup> Merchants and peddlers in caravans carried the finished Kashmiri shawls overland, some going north to Central Asia and east to China, while others ventured west to Russia and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>31</sup>

During the late eighteenth century, Kashmiri shawls were used as a table cloth for decoration purpose in France, and in the nineteenth century, France was the chief importer of Kashmiri shawls.<sup>32</sup> The Central Asian trade which carried Kashmiri shawls to Russia continued well into the nineteenth century. We find that Mullah Rahim Shah, a respectable merchant at Kabul, brought Kashmiri shawls for 17,000 rupees, and with them from Bokhara he made forty-seven marches to Orenburg, and from thence, after eleven days, he arrived at the celebrated market of Makria, in Russia. When he was acquainted with the rates of merchandise, he hurried down to Moscow with loads of shawls, where he realized 34,000 rupees, besides paying the transit duty, amounting to 200 rupees, which is taken in Russia as a duty upon a single piece of shawl, whether it values 100 rupees or 1,000.<sup>33</sup> Shawls worth Rs. 50,000 were annually exported from Kashmir through Ladakh to the Chinese provinces during the 1850s.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor or Mughal India 1653-1708*, transl. by William Irvine, John Murray, London, 1907, rep. in LPP, Delhi, 1990, vol. II, p. 402.

<sup>26</sup> Francisco Pelsaert, *The Remonstrantie*, transl. by W. H. Moreland and P. Geyl, *Jahangir's India*, W. Heffer and Son Ltd., Cambridge, 1925, pp. 19, 36; Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogol*, vol. II, p. 402; William Foster (ed.), *The English Factories in India, 1637-1641*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1912, p. 135.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, *A Short History of Chinese Turkistan*, transl. by Abdul Majid Mattoo, Centre of Central Asian Studies, Srinagar, 1981, f. 1b; Ippolito Desideri, *An Account of Tibet: The Travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, 1712-1727*, ed. by Filippo De Filippi, 1931, George Routledge & Sons Ltd., London, revised edition, 1937, pp. 132-33; Francoise Pommerat (ed.), *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century: The Capital of the Dalai Lamas*, transl. by Howard Solverson, Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, 2002, p. 153; Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir under the Sultans*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>28</sup> Janet Rizvi, *The Kashmir Shawl in the Mughal Period*, Marg: A Magazine of the Arts, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Akhtar Riazuddin, *The History of Handicrafts*, National Hijra Council, Islamabad, 1988, p. 330.

<sup>30</sup> K. Warikoo, *Central Asia and Kashmir*, Gian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 62-67.

<sup>31</sup> Michelle Maskiell, 'Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500-2000', *Journal of World History*, vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring, 2002), pp. 27-65.

<sup>32</sup> John Irwin, *The Marg*, vol. 6, p. 46; Ghulam Hasan Khoihami, *Tarikh-i Hasan*, vol. I, ff. 106-07; Cf. A. M. Mattoo, 'Shawl Industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 36 (1975), pp. 267-275.

<sup>33</sup> Mohan Lal, *Travels in the Panjab, Afghanistan, & Turkistan, To Balk, Bokhara, and Herat, and a Visit to Great Britain and Germany*, W. H. Allen & Co., London, 1846, p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Cunningham, *Ladak: Physical, Statistical and Historical*, W. H. Allen and Co., London, 1854, pp. 246-47.

Shawl industry witnessed the remarkable organizational and technical development during the Mughal period. The Mughal occupation of Kashmir created new market places for the shawl merchants in different parts of the empire. During certain political disturbances in the Mughal period, the trade link between Kashmir and other countries (particularly with Ladakh) came to a standstill, yet the shawl trade received great patronage from the state. It was during this period that there was a revival of shawl trade between Kashmir and the European countries (particularly with the European East India trading companies operating in Mughal India). Merchants from diverse regions of the world like Afghanistan, Persia, Central Asia, Yarkand, Kashghar, Tibet, Ladakh, Turkistan and later from Russia came to Kashmir to purchase the shawls. The shawl trade also received great impetus by the presence of these foreign merchants in the markets of Kashmir who linked this local economy with the global economy.