

A Study on Economic Development Under Mughal Rule in Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The Mughal period in Kashmir emerged as a defining era, characterized by transformative socio-economic and cultural shifts. This research delves into the multifaceted influence of the Mughal Empire on Kashmir, examining the administrative reforms, economic prosperity, architectural marvels, and the intertwining of Mughal and Kashmiri identities. While the region thrived under the Mughals, experiencing urban growth, trade expansion, and cultural renaissance, it simultaneously grappled with economic challenges, including high taxation, middlemen exploitation, and external threats. The study juxtaposes the region's advancements, such as the Zabt system and the architectural legacies of emperors like Jahangir and Shah Jahan, against the backdrop of inherent vulnerabilities and external pressures. In essence, the Mughal influence on Kashmir presents a rich tapestry of growth, integration, challenges, and resilience, offering profound insights into the complexities of regional governance and identity formation within a vast empire. This research serves as a comprehensive exploration of a historically significant period, emphasizing the nuanced interplay between power, culture, and economics in shaping the destiny of a region.

Keywords- economics, culture, administrative, Mughals, socio-economic.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kashmir, often eulogized as the 'Paradise on Earth' for its breathtaking beauty, underwent profound transformations during the Mughal era. When the Mughal Empire, under Akbar's leadership, annexed Kashmir in the late 16th century, it paved the way for a paradigmatic shift in the region's economic landscape^[1]. The succeeding Mughal rulers, particularly Jahangir and Shah Jahan, played instrumental roles in steering these transformations.

One of the hallmarks of this period was the rejuvenation of agriculture. Mughal administrative genius led to the expansion of cultivated lands, coupled with the introduction of novel crops and advanced farming techniques. This not only boosted the agrarian economy but was further supplemented with their ambitious irrigation projects. As Kashmir's fields flourished, so did its craft and industry. The world began to take note of the exquisite Pashmina shawls, intricately woven carpets, delicate papier-mâché crafts, and the luxurious saffron strands that the valley produced.

With the craft and industry sector burgeoning, trade and commerce thrived. The geographical positioning of Kashmir, serving as a conduit between South Asia and Central Asia, became an avenue of booming trade. The Mughals astutely developed a nexus of roads, inns, and caravanserais, facilitating the movement of goods. This not only led to an export surge of Kashmiri products but also ushered in imports of opulent goods and metals.

The Mughal period was also marked by administrative acumen. The introduction of the Zabt system and periodic land surveys ensured systematic revenue collection, lending transparency and efficiency to the taxation process^[2]. Alongside, the valley witnessed an era of infrastructural splendour. The picturesque gardens of Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Bagh, the fortified structures, and the bustling urban centre of Srinagar stand testament to this.

Yet, this era wasn't without challenges. The valley, on occasion, grappled with famines, administrative hurdles in its far-flung terrains, and the shadow of external invasions. But, undeniably, the

Mughal imprint on Kashmir's economy was indelible, integrating it into the broader economic matrix of the empire while enhancing its local dynamism.

II. AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

Under the Mughal dominion, Kashmir witnessed a notable surge in agricultural growth, turning the region into a prosperous agrarian society. This ascendancy was a result of various deliberate strategies and interventions made by the Mughal administration.

1. Expansion of Cultivated Land: Before the Mughal intervention, vast stretches of land in Kashmir remained fallow or underutilized. Recognizing the valley's potential, the Mughals initiated a systematic campaign to bring more land under cultivation. The policies included granting land rights, providing incentives to farmers, and ensuring protection against local feuds, which collectively boosted agricultural productivity.

2. Introduction of New Crops and Farming Techniques: The Mughals introduced an array of new crops, diversifying the agrarian output of the region. Rice, which became a staple of Kashmir, owes its prominence to this period. Additionally, farming techniques from other parts of the Mughal Empire, including crop rotation and improved irrigation methods, were introduced, paving the way for better yields.

3. Systematic Revenue Collection and Land Measurement: Akbar's reign heralded the implementation of the Zabt system, ensuring a standardized approach to revenue collection. This system, being meticulous, relied heavily on precise land measurements. Officials, known as 'patwaris', were assigned the task of measuring land and maintaining records^[3]. This systematic approach ensured fair taxation, fostering trust between the farmers and the administration.

4. Irrigation Projects: Kashmir, with its rivers and lakes, had a natural advantage for agriculture. However, the potential wasn't fully harnessed until the Mughals undertook extensive irrigation projects. Canals were dug, and waterways were diverted to ensure that even the distant fields received ample water. This, in turn, ensured consistent and bountiful harvests, irrespective of the vagaries of the weather.

The cumulative effect of these developments was monumental. The once-sporadic agricultural activities of the valley were transformed into a robust, organized sector under the Mughals. Farmers enjoyed better yields, the state coffers swelled with revenue, and Kashmir, as a whole, reaped the benefits of a thriving agrarian economy.

III. CRAFT AND INDUSTRY

The Mughal era was not just an epoch of political and administrative advancements; it was a period of

cultural and artistic efflorescence, too. Under the Mughal patronage, the craft and industry sectors of Kashmir flourished, becoming an integral part of the region's identity and economy.

1. Pashmina Shawl Industry: Kashmir's Pashmina shawls, admired for their soft texture and intricate designs, became a sought-after luxury item across the Mughal Empire and even reached markets in Central Asia and Europe. These shawls, made from the fine wool of Pashmina goats, encapsulated the artistic brilliance of Kashmiri craftsmen^[4]. Mughal emperors, particularly Jahangir and his successors, were often depicted in paintings donning these exquisite shawls, showcasing their royal affinity.

2. Papier-mâché, Carpet Weaving, and Silk Production: Another craft that witnessed a surge was papier-mâché, where artisans created intricate designs on molded paper pulp, making everything from decorative vases to jewelry boxes. Additionally, carpet weaving, inspired by Persian motifs and techniques, gained prominence. These carpets became synonymous with luxury and artistry. The sericulture industry, too, flourished with the Mughals encouraging the production of silk textiles, adding another feather to Kashmir's diverse craft repertoire.

3. Development of Saffron Cultivation: While saffron was native to Kashmir, its cultivation received a significant impetus under the Mughal rule. The cool climate and rich soil of regions like Pampore became conducive for saffron farms. As the red-gold strands of saffron began to gain popularity for their aroma and medicinal properties, they started contributing substantially to the local economy.

4. Promotion of Handicrafts and Arts by Mughal Emperors: The personal interests of Mughal emperors, especially Jahangir, in arts and crafts played a pivotal role in their promotion. Their patronage not only provided economic support to artisans but also a platform to showcase and sell their creations^[5]. These royal endorsements, combined with the meticulous skills of the craftsmen, made Kashmiri handicrafts a hallmark of luxury and sophistication.

Under the Mughal canopy, the crafts and industries of Kashmir underwent a renaissance. The legacy of this period is still evident today, with Kashmiri handicrafts holding a coveted position in global markets, bearing testimony to the golden age of artisanal brilliance during the Mughal rule.

IV. TRADE AND COMMERCE

The Mughal era in Kashmir was marked by a proliferation of economic activities, with trade and commerce emerging as significant drivers of prosperity. Enhanced by the region's strategic positioning and further bolstered by the Mughal administrative strategies, the avenues of trade blossomed, connecting Kashmir to the wider world in unprecedented ways^[6].

1. Kashmir's Strategic Location: Nestled between South Asia and Central Asia, Kashmir enjoyed a geographical advantage that made it a crossroads for traders, pilgrims, and scholars alike. This bridge-like positioning between major civilizations rendered the region a thriving hub for trade, facilitating the exchange of goods, culture, and ideas.

2. Development of Road Networks and Caravanserais: To bolster commerce, the Mughals undertook infrastructural developments. Road networks were expanded and improved, connecting remote parts of the valley to major trading centers. Caravanserais, or resting places for traveling merchants and their caravans, were built at strategic intervals. These not only provided shelter and safety but also became bustling markets where goods were exchanged and deals struck.

3. Export of Handicrafts, Dried Fruits, Medicinal Herbs, and Saffron: Kashmiri products began to find audiences far and wide. Handcrafted items, especially Pashmina shawls and carpets, were in demand in markets spanning from Delhi to Damascus. Additionally, dried fruits from the valley, known for their quality, were exported extensively^[7]. The medicinal herbs, nurtured by the region's unique ecology, and the prized saffron strands found buyers in both domestic and international markets.

4. Import of Luxury Goods, Metals, and Other Materials: While Kashmir became an export powerhouse, it was also a recipient of a myriad of imported goods. Luxury items from Persia, Central Asia, and even Europe made their way into the valley. Metals, essential for the local craft industry, textiles, and other materials were imported, enriching the local markets and catering to the tastes of the Mughal elites residing in or visiting the region.

The blend of strategic policies, Kashmir's inherent resource richness, and its geographical positioning culminated in an era where trade wasn't just an economic activity but also a cultural exchange. The Mughal period, thus, didn't just embed economic prosperity but also sowed the seeds for a cosmopolitan environment, where ideas, goods, and crafts flowed seamlessly, crafting a rich tapestry of interconnectedness.

V. TAXATION AND REVENUE SYSTEM

The consolidation of Mughal rule in Kashmir brought with it a series of administrative reforms, central to which was the restructuring of the taxation and revenue system. This system was not just about financial accrual but also signified a structured governance model, enhancing efficiency and fairness in revenue collection.

1. Introduction of the Zabt System: One of Akbar's most significant administrative reforms was the introduction of the Zabt system—a standardized land revenue system. Unlike the arbitrary tax impositions of previous reigns, the Zabt system was based on careful

assessment, taking into account the land's fertility, type, and produce^[8]. This ensured a more equitable and consistent method of tax imposition, ensuring farmers were neither overburdened nor the state coffers underfilled.

2. Periodic Surveys for Accurate Land Measurements: To support the Zabt system, regular surveys were conducted to measure the land accurately. This meticulous approach was crucial to ascertain the correct tax amounts. Landholders, or zamindars, were made accountable for providing accurate information, which was then cross-verified by the state-appointed officials. This periodic updating of records ensured that the data remained relevant and reflective of the actual conditions.

3. Establishment of a Transparent System to Collect Taxes: The Mughal administration brought about a departure from oppressive tax-collecting practices, which often led to exploitation and corruption. Instead, they instituted a transparent and accountable system. Local officials, or amils, were assigned the task of collecting taxes and were answerable to higher authorities, ensuring a layer of oversight. This not only reduced malpractices but also built trust among the populace, leading to more willing compliance.

The revamped taxation and revenue system under the Mughals marked a period of bureaucratic efficiency and fairness. By streamlining processes, introducing systems of accountability, and ensuring a rational approach based on actual land value and produce, the Mughals laid the foundation for a stable and prosperous Kashmir. This stability, in turn, further bolstered the economic growth and prosperity of the region during their reign.

VI. INFRASTRUCTURE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The Mughal imprint on Kashmir is not just seen in its commerce or crafts, but also vividly reflected in its urban landscapes and infrastructural edifices. The region, under Mughal leadership, experienced an unprecedented phase of infrastructural and urban transformation, underscoring the empire's vision for holistic development.

1. Creation of Majestic Gardens and Architectural Marvels: Mughal emperors, especially Jahangir, held a deep affection for the scenic beauty of Kashmir. This admiration gave birth to some of the most iconic Mughal gardens in the region, such as Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Bagh. Characterized by their terraced layouts, flowing water channels, and ornate pavilions, these gardens became spaces of leisure, reflection, and were often used as royal retreats.

2. Fortifications and Defensive Structures: Recognizing the strategic importance of Kashmir, the Mughals embarked on strengthening its defense capabilities. Forts and fortified structures were erected or renovated across the valley. These infrastructures not only

served as military bastions but also became centres of administration and governance.

3. Development of Srinagar as an Urban Centre: Srinagar, the heart of Kashmir, underwent significant urban expansion during the Mughal rule. The city's infrastructure was enhanced with better roads, bridges, markets, and public spaces^[9]. The establishment of bustling bazaars and trading hubs turned Srinagar into a vital nexus of commerce, culture, and governance.

4. Road Networks and Communication: Understanding the essence of connectivity for trade, governance, and defence, the Mughals invested heavily in developing a comprehensive road network. These roads, often lined with trees for shade, connected remote parts of the valley to major trading and administrative centres. Additionally, inns and caravanserais were established along these routes, facilitating smooth travel for merchants, officials, and other travellers.

The Mughal period in Kashmir stands out not just for its cultural and economic renaissance but also for the infrastructural metamorphosis it ushered in. By interweaving nature, aesthetics, and utility, the Mughals fashioned a Kashmir that was both enchanting in its beauty and robust in its urban and infrastructural framework. This era laid the foundation for the region's future growth, blending the ethereal charm of the valley with the pragmatic needs of an evolving society.

VII. ROLE OF MUGHAL EMPERORS

The Mughal intervention in Kashmir was not just a tale of territorial conquest, but also a narrative of socio-cultural and economic integration. Several Mughal emperors played pivotal roles in reshaping and influencing the region's trajectory, embedding their distinct legacies in the annals of Kashmir's history.

1. Akbar's Annexation and Administrative Integration: Akbar, the third Mughal emperor, annexed Kashmir in 1586, incorporating it into his vast empire. Beyond mere territorial expansion, Akbar's approach was holistic. He introduced administrative reforms, such as the aforementioned Zabt system, bringing Kashmir's governance in line with the rest of the empire. His policies aimed at ensuring justice and efficient administration, thereby creating a harmonious coexistence between the Mughals and the native populace.

2. Jahangir's Enchantment with Kashmir's Beauty: Jahangir's love for Kashmir is perhaps best encapsulated in his famous quote: "If there is a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here." He frequented the valley, drawing solace from its serene landscapes. Under his patronage, numerous gardens and architectural wonders were erected, reflecting both the region's natural beauty and the Mughal architectural prowess.

3. Shah Jahan's Architectural Legacy: Known for his architectural inclinations, as evident from the Taj Mahal, Shah Jahan continued the tradition of infrastructural development in Kashmir. His reign saw the construction

and enhancement of various structures, blending Persian aesthetics with Kashmiri craftsmanship. He fortified Srinagar and encouraged the growth of urban centres, infusing the region with Mughal grandeur.

4. Aurangzeb's Religious Policies: Aurangzeb's reign brought about a different kind of influence. He was more orthodox in his Islamic beliefs, and his policies reflected a stronger inclination towards Islamic practices. While his reign ensured continued administrative attention to Kashmir, it also marked a period of increased religious discourse, with an emphasis on aligning the region's practices with Mughal orthodoxy.

The reign of each Mughal emperor over Kashmir left a distinctive mark on its socio-cultural, administrative, and economic landscape. Collectively, their roles not only shaped the region's integration into the larger Mughal empire but also influenced its unique identity, interweaving Mughal ethos with Kashmir's indigenous charm. Their legacies, though varied, highlight the multifaceted engagement of the Mughals with the ethereal valley of Kashmir.

VIII. ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

While the Mughal era in Kashmir witnessed a surge in trade, crafts, and overall economic prosperity, it was not devoid of challenges. The Mughal's expansive empire, interspersed with diverse territories, meant that governance was a complex task, and this complexity had economic implications for regions like Kashmir.

1. High Taxation: Despite the implementation of the Zabt system, which aimed for an equitable approach to taxation, there were instances of excessive tax impositions. Periodic famines, floods, or other natural calamities often rendered the land unproductive. However, the state machinery sometimes failed to adjust tax demands accordingly, placing a significant burden on the peasantry.

2. Middlemen Exploitation: With the rise in trade and craft industries, a system of middlemen emerged. These middlemen often exploited artisans by buying their products at minimal prices and selling them at much higher rates in urban centers or outside the region. This disparity meant that while Kashmiri products gained fame, the artisans themselves remained relatively marginalized.

3. Uneven Development: While cities like Srinagar witnessed urban growth and development, many rural areas in the region lagged. The focus of the Mughal emperors was often more on urban centres, which led to a certain level of economic disparity between urban and rural zones.

4. Reliance on Agriculture: Despite the growth of crafts and trade, a significant portion of Kashmir's economy still relied on agriculture. This over-dependence made the region vulnerable to natural calamities. Unpredictable weather patterns, floods, or pests could

lead to crop failures, impacting the overall economic stability of the area.

5. External Threats and Invasion: Kashmir's strategic location made it a prized possession, and thus, it often faced external threats. Periodic invasions or threats thereof disrupted trade routes, discouraged investments, and sometimes resulted in material damage, all of which posed challenges to the region's economic prosperity.

While the Mughal rule brought in administrative reforms, infrastructure development, and cultural integration, it could not entirely insulate Kashmir from inherent economic challenges. These challenges serve as a reminder that while empires can influence regional trajectories significantly, they cannot always mitigate inherent or emerging vulnerabilities.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Mughal era in Kashmir stands out as a transformative period, melding the region's socio-economic, cultural, and administrative landscape. While it ushered in unprecedented prosperity, innovation, and integration, it was not without its share of challenges. The meticulous administrative reforms, the flourishing of arts and crafts, the vibrancy of trade, and the architectural marvels contrasted with the economic hurdles faced by artisans, farmers, and traders.

Kashmir, under the Mughals, became a melting pot of indigenous traditions and Mughal influences, resulting in a rich tapestry of shared culture and history. The legacies left behind by the Mughal emperors, from Akbar's administrative acumen to Jahangir's enamored with the valley's beauty, shaped Kashmir in myriad ways. Yet, the challenges of the era, be it excessive taxation, exploitation, or external threats, underscore the complexities of governance and the delicate balance of growth and equity.

In retrospect, the Mughal period in Kashmir serves as a testament to the dynamic interplay of power,

culture, economics, and regional identity. It offers invaluable insights into the possibilities and pitfalls of empire-building and regional integration, painting a multifaceted portrait of a region in flux, forever weaving its past into the tapestry of its present and future.

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