



## Franco-Prussian war and the decline of Shawl industry in Kashmir (1870-1871A.D)

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**Abstract:** Kashmir situated on the fringes of the sub-continent did not remain isolated from these developments on account of its strategic position as well as with the opening of the Jhelum valley road in 1890. It came even more directly connected to the foreign as well as Indian markets. Kashmir that was heavily relying on the foreign countries for its trade had to suffer. During the War periods the main exports of Kashmir especially shawl, Carpets Silk, woollens, papier mache, silver- ware, wood-carving and *numdas* etc. faced positive as well as negative impact.

**Keynotes:** - shawl, import, export, market, fashion, income, decline.

### Introduction:-

Kashmir is known for its artistic prowess since time immemorial. This has been testified by travelers who landed in valley during different epochs. The word “shawl” is derived from the Persian (and Kashmiri) *Shaal*, which refers not just to a particular article of clothing, such as the shoulder mantle, but also to a variety of fine woolen fabrics. Shawl manufacturing industry is said to be “as old as the hills of Kashmir” but it had practically died during the later Hindu period. Its revival towards the close of the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. is attributed to Sayyid Ali Hamdani who visited Kashmir in 1379 A.D. On his way along snowy mountains of Ladakh, he was provided with socks made of *pashmina* wool. The soft and warm wool attracted his attention and therefore, on his return he took some wool to Srinagar where he presented it to the Sultan Qutab-ud-Din (1374-89 A.D.) who got it manufactured into a shawl. Sultan Zainu’l Abidin (1420-1470 A.D) also encouraged the production of different crafts in Kashmir viz, shawls, carpets, bookbinding, silks, paper, glass etc Pandit Anand Kaul a Kashmiri historian writes:

“Zainu’l-Abidin turned Kashmir into a smiling garden of industry inculcating in the hearts of the people conception of labour and also implanting in their minds the germ of real progress. He introduced correct measures and weight promoted commercial morality, integrity and industrial righteousness; it was through these virtues that the Kashmiris successfully carried on their shawl and other trade worth crores 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.”

### Trade relations:-

However, the use of the word, “shawl” to represent woolen garment became popular during the reign of Mirza Hyder Doughlat (1540-1550 A.D.). It was not until the Mughal period (1585-1758 A.D) that the industry achieved its full potential. On the eve of the Mughal occupation of Kashmir in 1586 A.D. Shawl industry had not only

been extensively established but the industry had attained a high degree of perfection. According to Mughal chronicler, there were two hundred factories for making shawls and were exported to various countries of the world. The shawls of Kashmir were given the name of *Param Naram* by Emperor Akbar. To quote Abul Fazl ‘the Kashmiri shawls are exported to ever clime’. Bernier, who visited Kashmir in the company of Aurangzeb in 1665 wrote:

“what may be considered peculiar to Kachemira, and the staple commodity that which particularly promotes the trade of the country and fills it with wealth, is the prodigious quality of shawls which they manufacture and which gave occupation even to the little children. ‘To him Kashmir is the birth place of shawls.’”

In 1796 A.D Abdullah Khan, an Afghan Governor of Kashmir presented orange-coloured shawl to a blind man, named Sayid Yahaya, from Baghdad. On his way back, Sayid gave it as a present to Khedive of Egypt. Soon after, Napoleon Bonaparte came to Egypt with his famous fleet with the object of harassing the English in India; he was smashed up by Nelson on the Nile. The Khedive gave him this shawl as a present. Napoleon sent it to France and it attracted the fashionable people there. French traders soon came to Kashmir to indulge in the trading activities of shawl and exported shawls of various designs to France.

Besides, the Indian sub-continent shawls exported to Armenia, Central Asia, Afghanistan and Russia at the time of Moorcroft’s visit (1823). As mentioned earlier that the Kashmiri shawl had got introduced to French market much earlier, it was as a result of this trade that later on gave actual boost to the shawl industry of Kashmir. In France, Kashmiri shawls had become a fashion of the day after Napoleon Bonaparte presented a Kashmiri shawl to his beloved Empress Josephine. France where the craze for shawls had spread like a wild fire, determined to emulate Josephine Bonaparte, the future Empress, fashionable women had to have at least one shawl, and preferably several, as an accessory for their many gowns. According to Young Husband: ‘from 1862-1870, the export of shawls averaged 25 to 28 lakhs of rupees per annum, or over a quarter of a million sterling, and when the trade was at its zenith 25,000 to 28,000 persons were engaged in its manufacturing.

In spite of the heavy custom duties, the shawl industry progressed and thrived as a result of enormous export demand from France and other European countries. Shawl has become a sign of prestige and an article of distinction in well to do families of Europe and the Kings and Queens, the Princess and Princesses of both east and west had developed interest to have it. This amounted simply to the high cost for the Kashmiri shawls; even a single piece of shawl was sold at a fabulous price of Rs.12500 in those days. France was the major consumer of this pride product of Kashmir, as is evident from the following table:

Country	Percentage
France	80%
U.S.A	10%
Italy	5%
Russia	2%
U.K	1%
Germany	1%

**Source:**Bates, C. E., *A Gazetteer of Kashmir, Kishtwar, Badrawar, Jammu, Noashera, Punch and the Valley of Kishan Ganga*, 1980, Light and Life Publishers, New-Delhi, p. 59.

**Impact of Franco-Prussian war:-**

Simultaneously, the most pressing European problems of this period (1871-1914), was that of adjusting the old European systems to the new Germany. It has been seen that the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, was the essential and critical one of the trail in which Prussia was engaged, and it was the result of that war that the vital foundation of her subsequent power was laid. After four years there was another war in which Prussia was engaged and it was Franco- Prussian war of 1870-71, which was important enough to the future history of Europe as well as to Kashmir, as shawl trade was at its peak with France by that time.

On 19<sup>th</sup> July 1870, the French Emperor declared war to Prussian kingdom. Napoleon III led the Army. France weakened by its preceding wars (Crimea, Italy, Mexico) had an army of hardly two hundred thousand men on frontier against five hundred thousand men of Germany. Without any obstacle on their way, the German army invaded the region of champagne and finally reached Paris.

It was because of this war France lost nearly 17000 ‘communes’ whole Alsace and part of Lorraine. It represented the loss of 1600,000 men: moreover, under the terms of the Treaty of Frankfurt, France had to pay an indemnity of 5 billion gold francs plus the interests of 567 million francs, to the German winner. To guarantee that payment, the enemy stationed troops and occupied some French departments for 2 years. During this period the French army got the right to station in the Loire. France cried over 138, 000 killed people, prestige in the world and on her economy, which shattered completely by this war. This war had come with misfortunes not only for people of France, or shattered its economy completely, but also had a deep impact upon the social and economic conditions of the people of a small state situated quite far away from the France viz, Kashmir, as France alone accounted for the 80% of shawl exports from Kashmir by that time.

**Conclusion:-**

The impact of this war had its adverse effect on the Kashmiri shawl as is evident from the fact that there remained only 5,148 *shawl bafs* (*weavers*) against 28,000 as per the *Census Report of 1891*. Out of these some 800 to 900 are estimated by Lawrence to have shifted to the weaving of carpet, (the industry that had emerged in Kashmir because of the British patronage). The subsequent years witnessed the number reduced sharply to 148 only.

According to Lawrence, after this war there was no one in France who could now aspire for a ‘Cashmere Shawl’, as he was told by an eye witness of “the intense excitement and interest with which Kashmir shawl weavers watched the fate of France in that great struggle, bursting into tears and loud lamentations when the news of Germany’s victories reached them” dashing all their hopes to ground. To further substantiate this argument to quote, Biscoe, the shawl trade suffered a severe blow “was practically brought to end by the Franco-Prussian war of 1870”. Most of the shawls were exported to France, so that when the Prussian demanded so great a war indemnity the French had no spare cash with which to purchase Kashmir shawls.

### References

1. Shawl signifies a kind of very soft and delicate woolen fabrics of Kashmir made from the fleece of a goat reared exclusively in the mountainous regions of Ladakh and Tibet. *Al shal* (Arabic), *shal* (Persian), and shawl (English), all denote a rectangular piece of woolen cloth of Kashmir worn on shoulders. In Persian '*shal*' also means a garment usually worn on shoulders. In Sanskrit we find words like *Shalmal*, *Sal* and *Sala* which respectively mean 'the silk-cotton tree', to shine, 'be endowed with' and 'fence' and indicate the quality which the Kashmir shawl is famous for throughout the world. Across the northern mountains of the valley there is the land of *Dards* in whose language '*sha*' means the shawl-wool goat. Mr. Vigne visited this land in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and found that the '*sha*' is a *Tragelaphus*, or goat deer, which furnishes wool profusely. It is most probable the origin of the term shawl is in '*sha*'. Vigne, G.T, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh, Iskardoo*, vol ii, 1842, Colburn Press London, p.280.
2. References are found in Hindu scripture which point to its great antiquity. During the epic age this industry is said to have firmly established in the Kashmir valley, and "tradition has it that when Krishna went to Kaurvas as a delegate from the Pandavas, the present of Dhritrastra to him included 10,000 shawls of Kashmir, *Census of India 1921*, vo l,XXII, part ii,pp.180-81.
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4. *Tarikh-i-Hassan (J&K Publication)*, 1954, Vol, I, p.351-56.
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11. King or leader.
12. Moorcraft, William and Trebeck, George, *Travels in Hindustan Himalayan Provinces of 'Hindustan and Punjab' in Ladakh and Kashmir, in Peshawar, Kabul, kunduz and Bokhara*, 1971, Sagar Publications New Delhi, p103-5.
13. Rizvi, Janet with Ahmad, Monisha, *Pashmina, The Kashmir Shawl and Beyond*,2009, Gulshan Publishers,Srinagar, p.228.

14. Ames, Frank, *The Kashmir Shawl and its Indo- French Influence*, 1986, England, pp20-26.
15. Young husband, Francis, *Kashmir*, 1996, Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, p212.
16. In 1809 Baron Gros painted a full length portrait of the empress Josephine. She is shown wearing dress made out of a white cashmere shawl, its pine ornamentation enhancing the lower part of the skirt; a red shawl is round her waist, one end trailing on the ground like a train while the other end, draped forwards over a left shoulder, hangs down in front. Records show that Josephine owned about 60 shawls some of which had a cost as much as 8,000-12,000 francs, an exorbitant price in those times. Strauss, Levi, *The Romance of Kashmir Shawls*, 1974, New Delhi.
17. Forester George, *A Journey from Bengal to England Through the Northern Part of India, Kashmir Afghanistan, Persia and into Russia by Caspian Sea*, vol. ii, 1808, Oxford publications, London p22.
18. Austria.
19. Prussia was a historically prominent German state that originated in 1525 A.D. with a Dutch centered on the region of Prussia on the southeast coast of the Baltic Sea.
20. Ketelbey, C.D.M, *A Short History of Modern Europe*, 1929, Oxford University Press, New York, Revised Edition, p 466, here after quoted as (Short History).
21. France.
22. Bates, C.E, *A Gazetteer of Kashmir, Kishtwar, Badrawar, Jammu, Naoshera, Punch and the Valley of the Kishen Ganga*.1980, Light and life Publishers, New Delhi.
23. Grant and Temperely, *Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (1789-1950)*, 1927,
24. Marriot, J.A.R, *European common wealth*, 1945, Oxford University Press London, pp.184-87.
25. A 'Commune' has caused some confusion. It has often taken to mean that the insurrection of 1871 was promoted by communists. They had doubtless, a hand in it but the commune was primarily a patriotic movement; the term itself recalled the days of the first revolution in which the commune (i.e. the municipality) of Paris played notable part, Marriot, *History of Europe (1813-1939)*, p.263.
26. The treaty was ratified on March 1, 1871. In its definitive form it was signed at Frankfurt on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1871. Thirty thousand German troops entered Paris and stayed there a short time, irritating by their presence the passions of the Parisians which were shortly to boil over into a terrible insurrection. As a result of the war the French troops left papal territory (August 19, 1870), a

- large force entered Rome (September 20), and a plebiscite united her to Italy on October 2. Grant and Temperely, op.cit, p.281.
27. For the causes of this war see Howard, M, *The Franco-Prussian War*, pp. 40-41, 432, 455, Ketelbey, (HOMT) op.cit, p. 281.
  28. *Census Report of 1891, p.10 and 1911, p.233, and valley of Kashmir*, Walter Lawrence, *Gulshan publishers, Srinagar, p.357*.
  29. Biscoe, Tyndale, *Kashmir in sunlight and shade*, 1922, (re-print) Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, p.115-16.
  30. Young Husband, Francis, *Kashmir*, 1996, Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, p.212.