



Original Article

# Historical Analysis of Afghan Folk Culture in Kashmir During 1752-1819



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## Abstract

*Kashmir, the kingdom of fairies and Paradise in the World has a history of being ruled by several dynasties. Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim empires have all held power over it. Every dynasty has unique folk customs that reflect the character of that dynasty. A community's residents' way of life is referred to as its culture. Afghan and Kashmiri folklore are based on traditional drama, music, and other activities. The current study makes an effort to investigate the traditional view of Afghan authority in Kashmir from 1752 to 1819. Kashmir history demonstrates that several folk beliefs entered Kashmiri society at this time. In the age of Afghan rule, the perceptions of folk culture are supported by historical evidence like material and non-material sources, direct and indirect sources and oral traditional sources. This study highlights the Afghan folk literary work, plays (Raza Pather and Derza Pather) and traditional Kashmiri theatre (Bhand Pathers). The data used in this study is gathered from secondary sources.*

**Keywords:** Afghan rule, Folk dramas, Folk lore, Historical evidence and Kashmir

## INTRODUCTION

Culture is one of the English words with the most subtlety. In this section, we discuss folk culture, which is the way that regular locals go about their daily lives. These practices usually build upon enduring traditions that go back to pre-industrial era. The folk cultures are frequently seen as an essential component of the real, lived experiences of actual people. If folk culture is acted out for the advantage of visitors, many elements of the unique "folk cultures" may have been improved through time to make them more appealing (Hall, et al., 2003). Every community has unique cultures, traditions, and customs that reflect the character of a particular dynasty. Culture refers to a group of people's way of life. Kashmiri culture is wholly Islamic, and the current study examines how Afghan culture affected Kashmiri society while Afghans were in control.

### Background of the Study:

The sixty seven (67) year period of Afghan rule had numerous early effects on society of Kashmir. Some of them gained recognition through the establishment of perspectives that were known as "folk perceptions of Afghans" in later years. These viewpoints serve as the primary sources used by various historians to reconstruct the history of various live individuals in a specific geo-climatic environment. A researcher can undertake a thorough investigation of the given content using historical evidence because it includes a wide variety of sources, resources, and reviews. Bernard Bailyn correctly notes that a researcher's inquisitive mind can turn bits of information into agreements and demonstrations of their relevance without any outside assistance (Bailyn, 1963). In addition to traditional and written evidence, the broader category of evidence also contains a significant amount of primary material in the form of conversational sources. A source is anything that sheds light on the history of humanity (George & Fawcett, 1924).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The focus of the current study is on the role played by Afghan governors between 1752 and 1819 in the development of folk culture in Kashmir. Even though it's crucial to review all of the published and unpublished research on the issue and the area in question, the creation of this research effort was aided by the material that was already available in the form of books, research articles, and other pertinent texts. Several State libraries were used to gather the material on the topic. The case for rewriting history and filling in the gaps, as well as the literary support for Afghans' claim to Kashmir in their cultural history, need additional emphasis in light of the literature that is currently accessible on the subject.

## METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this study is descriptive. To determine the truth, secondary sources are used, including books, research publications (from many online sources, including Google scholar and Google, Web), newspaper articles, website articles, magazine articles, and other published and unpublished data.

## **Analysis of Historical Data of Afghan Folk Culture**

Hereford Brooke George divides the following historical data into two major categories in his thorough studies:

### **Direct & Indirect Sources**

Direct sources are all conventional sources, such as written materials of every form, from official records to personal correspondence. The things that shed incidental light on historical questions, such as artefacts, mythologies, and tales, are all considered indirect sources since they lack the characteristics of recorded proof (Mir, 2011).

### **Material & Non-Material Sources**

Historical data is divided into two categories; material and non-material. His favorite sources for the material category are things like coins, monuments, and buildings, while for the non-material category, he concentrates on things like institutions, religious doctrine, customs, legends, myths, tales, folklore, panthers and songs (Lemisko, 2004).

### **Historical Sources**

Researchers have created a compressive classification system for all historical materials from the contemporary era, including written, verbal, soundless, and mixed sources. The sources include verbal testimony that serves a purpose, folklore, legends and traditional narratives. (Goldstein, 1976) This discussion makes it obvious that non-conventional sources, notably oral traditions, have been given the appropriate weight in the historical process together with the document.

### **Oral Traditional Sources**

Oral traditions from Kashmir are rife with references to a variety of political management, governmental records, official hierarchy, and the schemes of exploitationist, among them the religious and feudal leaders. This contrasts with written data that has been transmitted to us in the shape of various literary genres. In contrast, the information preserved in the oral traditions typically echoes the suffering and desires of a large number of the general masses. This is because the authors of chronological literary texts typically belonged to wealthy Kashmiri families who were very near to the power corridors, and as a result, their works occasionally unintentionally or intentionally replicated the mind set of elite class (Mir, 2011).

The social associations and degree of obscurantism or enthusiasm in a particular civilization are all explained by the oral tradition. Additionally, it reflects the people's inspirational values, behaviors, attitudes, customs, rites, and beliefs. Additionally, it offers an examination of people's motivations, psyches, and psychological reactions to a specific social occurrence (Hangloo, 2022). Because they lack an author and a date of origin, historians have callously and unsympathetically ignored the oral traditions. A society gave rise to oral tradition, which is passed down from one group to the next with some variations in form, substance, and spirit. It genuinely embodies the community's ethos because it is collective in nature and expresses the values and customs of community life.

Henry James states that oral tradition is a form of literature that possesses the qualities of fiction, spontaneity, empathy, and symbolic immediacy between the narrator and the recipient. It is a detached record that depicts any incident to the people, the historian, and the contributors as they relate their own narratives. It is accumulated from the center to the background and is uttered by actors and has a social memory quality (Marwick, 2005).

### **Categories of the Materials & Oral Tradition**

Folk stories, myths, songs, legends, curses, charms, jokes, proverbs, chants, riddles, taunts, exploitations, taunts, superstitions, customs, medications, and attitudes, are only a few of the many types of materials and oral tradition. These states have always been terrible due to the ruthless rule of the Afghans, and the machinery of intimidation and control was regularly employed to repress even the real popular discontent. As a result, many in Kashmir seek to anonymous outlets to voice their opinions about the dysfunctional

government and other follies of the state apparatus (Mir, 2011). Another issue is that for Kashmiris, ignorance and illiteracy were marked, and oral traditions were valued as a source of knowledge, sage advice, and historical information (Goldstein, 1976).

### Historical Script (Rajtrangni)

In societies where history writing has been a top priority for the society's upper groups, these evidences bear rich fruit. Though the practice of writing historical accounts extends back, the history of Kashmir was first fully recorded by Kalhan in his book *Rajtaragni* in the 12th century. This work has mostly focused on those segments of Kashmiri historical tradition that have had power, authority, and status up until this point, while the vast majority of the history of the common people has gone unrecorded (Mir, 2011). The oral folklore, particularly in folk fiction such as stories, tales, riddles, songs and dramas, vividly expressed this lack of response. By expressing trustworthy hints and elements of community, collective spirit, and philosophy, these traditional and unconventional historical sources provide illuminating insights into the qualities of the civilization.

### Folk Literature & Afghan Governance

When Afghans began to dominate Kashmir in 1752 A.D., the seeds of hostility deepened as they applied pressure with grievances and sought legitimacy for their survival. When Afghan subedars discover the weak central power and begin to uprising against them for independent rule, Afghan authority and regional forces fuel this struggle. This caused the situation to spiral out of control and resulted in chaos, doubt, mistrust, and insecurity. In particular, Kashmiri folk literature captures the actual nature of Kashmiri society. Oral traditions may be a better source for gathering the folk perspective on Afghan rule and culture for an objective analysis of the populace's reaction. Since the folk collection is not owned by any one-person, folk literature's authors, despite being victims of governmental brutality were protected from the violence and immoral behavior of the rulers (Fayaz, 1999). One might even make the case that using these conventional procedures gives a real representation of viewpoints of Kashmiri people that have been missed or unrecorded using the conventional sources.

### Folk Theaters and Plays of Kashmir & Afghan Governance

The Afghan dominion can be categorized as an ongoing struggle among the Afghans and local population, particularly the Bombas, Khakhas, and Gujjars of Poonch who claimed their own sovereign status and attempted plundering and arson. The main cause of periodic sectarian fighting, which primarily involved Shiites and Sunnis, was poor governance. In addition, nature was punishing them by causing natural disasters like floods, famines, earthquakes, etc., as well as by punishing them via the pitiful story of miss governance. Despite this, during the Afghan rule the work continued in the promotion of folk-plays and theater in Kashmir. Following are the some examples of this activity.

#### *Bhand Pather*

Nearly all folk literary genres, including plays (Bhand Pather), proverbs, sayings, quotations, ballads, and tales, contain deplorable depictions of Afghan rule in Kashmir. (Kemmu, 1953). For instance, Kashmir's traditional theatre is represented by "Bhand Pathers" in historical, conventional and traditional folk plays. The reader is familiar with "Raza Pather" and "Darze Pather," two plays that are overly long and entirely concentrated on the opulent and sensual appetites of the Afghan royalty (Mir, 2011).

#### *Raza Pather*

Using a variety of theatrical approaches, folk plays demonstrated the lack of public welfare and administrative interference. Due to the widespread corruption in Kashmir during Afghan administration, several Afghan governors as well as Subedhars and Naib-subedhars were appointed. These individuals were continually plundering Kashmir's destitute peasantry under the appearance of "Rasum" and supplementary associated tax charges. High taxes were being practiced across the Indian subcontinent. (Mukhtar, 2021) The folk drama "Raza Pather" features the characters "Sagwan" and "Potter," each of whom represents a distinct part of this circumstance. From a potter, "Sagwan" is supposed to expect honey (Kral). The Kral (Potter) delivers a jug of mud instead of honey and uses it as a bribe to be given

to "Sagwan." It suggests the ferocious hostility of menial rural professionals toward dishonest officials, but it also suggests the possibility of a mass uprising against the current order, which is only supported by dishonest activity (Mir, 2011). An excerpt from "Raza Pather," which describes these corrupt officials' former lifestyles of living in expansive homes and attending "colorful parties." is included below:

*"Sagwan: (while slapping at Kral/Potter)  
Have your brought honey?  
Potter: (bending his head a bit down  
Here, it is sir, it is in this basket.  
Sagwan: Have you brought fowl?  
Potter: I have got honey as well as fowl (unloading the basket, potter  
takesout a mouthful of mud and starts eating it).  
Sagwan: Where is honey?  
Potter: (referring to mud) This is honey would you like to taste it?  
Here it is (pointing to mud)" (Mir, 2011).*

Observers and readers were made aware of the underlying contempt that was shown vocally and physically, directly and indirectly, towards this corrupt rule that had obtained official support from Afghans. Through the two main characters in the "Raza Pather" exposes numerous types of dishonest state officials and holds them in high regard among the general population. The moral laxity that persisted in Kashmir throughout the Afghan feudal system is also highlighted in the Kashmiri play "Pather." The immorality and corruption of the Afghan elite are exposed. As a result of the government officials' attempts to construct hurdles to prevent the suffering peasants from raising legitimate complaints with the Afghan governor, the "plough sight" in the play encounters the maximum level of administrative rejection and societal disregard. In the symbolic performance, "Plough" (alban) holds up the plough while carrying a petition paper as a representation of the peasantry's silent protest against the unjust actions of revenue officials. On a larger scale, this drama represents an organized peasantry protest against the worst abuse of public rights by Afghan Ijaradars in historical fashionable texts. In Bagh-e-Sulaiman, Sadullah Shahadi argues that the play on this stage can be viewed as the chronicles are replete with information on the illegal exactions that frequently made it difficult for the destitute peasantry to survive (Mir, 2011).

Under the Afghan, the Ijharadari system grew to terrifying dimensions. The first Afghan governor, Abdullah Khan Ishaq, actually got the entirety of Kashmir in Ijhara in exchange for a sizable sum of twenty-four lakh rupees that would be realized via land revenue and other different taxes. The Ijharadari system contributed to population reduction and foretold the end of the peasantry. No matter how he realised it, the mustajir was frequently compelled by the relationships of pact to bring a specific amount of money within a specific amount of period (Shahabadi, 1780).

### **Derza Pather**

"Derza Pather," is another ancient traditional play from Kashmir, is a metaphor for the predatory Afghan controlling ethos. "Dard Raja," a representative of the Afghan ruling class, is frequently depicted with stunning Kashmiri courtesans known as "Derzas" in popular culture. The Raja's behaviors during their passionate encounters with these two "Derzas" and the Afghan governor's company are evocative of the scandalous and sensual behavior pattern of the Afghan governing class. The "Maskaras" purposefully interjecting is an attempt to give the "Raja" the idea that the people is aware of expensive and disgraceful lifestyle of Afghan upper-class while not having access to the corridors of power (Varley, 1971).

The scene in "Derza Pather" where Maskhara (Jesters) requests "Raja" to restore the ability to express oneself to otherwise speechless driven Kashmiri is one of the film's most striking moments. The characters in this play serve as metaphors for how sensitive the Kashmiri people were and how concerned they were about preserving their political and cultural identities. In the drama "Derze Pather," the Afghans of Kashmir speak pure Persian as their native tongue. Afghans spoke Persian as their official language, which allowed for straightforward idea expression and excellent communication with the past. However, the imposition of an alien tongue further separated Kashmiris from Afghans, and Kashmiris felt a deep

and painful sense of language causality as a result of the foreign rulers (Mir, 2011).

A tragic scene from "Darze Pather" demonstrates the contempt Kashmiris felt for Afghans due to the unfortunate state of the Kashmiri language.

- "Dard: Do you want to express in Punjabi?  
 Maskhara: Yes of course, I can speak Punjabi, Arabic, Hindi, Ladakhi, but not Persian.  
 Raja: Rohilla – Where have you come from?  
 Rohilla: I have come from Kabul  
 Raja: Well done, Do you know Punjabi?  
 Rohilla: I know Persian language Punjabi language, Pashtu language, but I do not know Kashmiri language" (Mir,2011).

### Afghan Governance in Kashmir

When Kashmir was incorporated into the Mughal monarchy, governors of Kashmir were appointed by the Mughal King as their direct successors in that region maintained the strict revenue machinery to make it difficult for the impoverished, rural Kashmiris to survive while Afghans continued to expand into this region to tramp them underfoot (Kaw, 2001).

#### *Imposition of Substantial taxes by Afghan Governors*

Both modern historical literature and folklore have provided evidence of how Kashmir's excessively hefty taxes contributed to the demise of the agricultural and industrial sectors. The "Gulshai-e-Dastur" author includes details about tax authorities and revenue functionaries. According to the Afghan law, each village that earned at least a "Kharwar of paddy" annually paid one trak in addition to regular taxes to the revenue authorities. Similar to this, every hamlet had to provide the Kardar two annas each rupee of "mehsul" annually (Jahangir, 2020). Karim Khan and Azim Khan, two subsequent Afghan rulers of Kashmir, required extravagant payments of Rs. 10–20 from the villagers' peasants as well as 5–10 sheep, 2–4 tracks of oil, 4–tracks of salt, and 5–10 kharwas of rice each year (Mir, 2011).

#### *The Verbal Representations and Folk Expression*

These verbal representations, which are also folk tales and songs, use metaphors to represent unreasonable and unheard-of state demands. The folk expression, which was a secure means of expressing their feelings, complaints, and expression, is attested by the modern history narrative as well.

A cold-blooded killer, Haji Karimdad Khan killed both Muslims and Hindus after being provoked. He pushed many more out of the nation through Aslam Harkaram, his dishonest tax collection, and extorted more individuals than even the infamous Mughal subehdhar Itiqad Khan. Some Pandits were at risk of smoke inhalation because they were involved in a plot against Karimdad with the Bombas. Karimdad discovered a sizable indemnity known as Zar-e-dad for librating them. The price of shawls from the weavers was also subject to an anna tax, per rupee (Mir, 2011). After the passing of his father, Karimdad Khan, Azad Khan assumed control of Kashmir as an Afghan. A phrase known as "Azad Khanun Dabdabe" became popular in folklore due to his ferocity, bad temper, and arrogance. While Timur Shah, the Afghan ruler, required Azad to pay three lakh rupees in tribute after declaring his independence, like many other early governors, Azad naturally obtained twice as much money by raising tax rates. In an oral tradition, the following tale of his haughtiness and ferocity is told (Jahangir, 2020).

In his own internal narration, Azad Khan described himself as the ruthless, infamous, and unjust ruler of Kashmir. Azad Khan allegedly told his wife that he would elevate her status in the royal family if the kid was a boy, and that if the baby was a girl, he would kill her. According to folklore, Azad Khan is supposed to have dismembered his wife and her newborn child after learning that his wife had given birth to a girl child. His worst traits are safely revealed in this folktale, which conceals the source and location. The folklore also states that Azad Khan, who was pompous, was displeased because the news garnered more attention in civic circles. The Afghan governor discovered that the information had been passed from one

member of the imperial domestic to the common populace at the Zaina Kadal conversation centre, and after conducting an investigation, he ordered the man's execution and the concentration of all buildings on either side of the Zaina Kadal (bridge) over the River Jehlum to their ruins (Mir, 2011).

Azeem Khan, a member of the Afghan governing class who is still well-known, had a reputation from the beginning of his career for being hated for his terrible deeds. He showed this by letting unleashed a reign of terror after the war, taking the Jagirs of some Hindu Zamindars, and suffering alongside the Pandits alongside many Muslims. After defeating the Sikh forces, he become more conceited and brutal. Azeem Khan ignored the native citizens when he quit all of Kashmiries from the army. He did not trust their loyalty, which is another instance of how his merciless actions were demonstrated by depriving the local community (Mir, 2011). Azeem Khan used all available means to extract as much money as he could from various segments of Kashmiri society, including Jagirdars, Zamindars, Sahibkars, Peshkars, Artisans, peasants, and other professionals. There were hardly any professions or groups of skilled workers who escaped his obstinacy and cruelty. Numerous historians have provided direct and indirect evidence that oral descriptions are an important source for the history of Kashmir. Such types of folklore serve as the foundation for the majority of Kashmir's history. This material is used to argue several historical viewpoints (Mir, 2011).

As historiography has progressed to the point with references to a variety of political management, governmental records, official hierarchy, and the schemes of exploitations, among them the religious and feudal leaders, and new themes have been injected into the body of historical research and writing as the scope of historical examination has significantly expanded. In contrast to traditional sources, non-predictable sources have shown to be of enormous service and worth for history writers. Currently, organized consideration is being paid to comprehending the psycho-social framework of common men and learning about the responses and perspectives of the populace. Each of the various systems or structures that make up history has its own internal coherence, which historians should be able to identify and explain.

## CONCLUSION

When Afghans came into power, Kashmir underwent some significant cultural changes. Due to political unrest and natural disasters, many people left the Kashmir valley. How many individuals resided in Kashmir at that time is supported by credible sources. Only a few suggestions from the diaries of a few European tourists who visited Kashmir after the Afghan control ended can provide us any information. The position of the Kashmiri people was then articulated through Pathers, such as "Derze Pather" and "Raze Pather," as well as folk literature, myths, hymns, lores, poetry, and drama.

## Competing Interest

The author had no competing interests.

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