

Engendering Women in Workspaces: Household And Economy in Nineteenth Century Kashmir

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ABSTRACT:

The region of Kashmir has long been in the news for armed conflicts and for the constant political disturbances in the area. This meta narrative of dispute and contestation overshadows the rich cultural heritage that Kashmir and its people own. For instance, textiles (in particular Kashmiri shawls), paper mache, stone artists, and sericulture industry are few to name and what is even lesser known is the fact that Kashmiri Women are the major contributors in all these industries.

It is evident from the literature produced in the nineteenth century that apart from doing household chores most Kashmiri women were either involved in working on the fields or helped males of the family in the production of handicrafts. Hand spinning was the basic occupation of Kashmiri women with around 80% of women being involved in spinning. However, very few sources written in the period give women their due credit. Their work is either mostly mentioned being clubbed with that of the men in their house or completely invisibilized. The nineteenth century was a period when the British had started getting a stronghold over the economy of Kashmir by controlling the then present political dispensation of the Dogras. This led to an export of Kashmiri shawls to Europe and other countries in large numbers. However, the major force behind this prosperous international trade, the Kashmiri women artisans neither got an appropriate share in the revenue generated nor the recognition due to them.

This paper, therefore, attempts to look at the contribution of women artisans of Kashmir in the handicraft industries in the nineteenth century. It will try and mainstream the contribution of these women both to the household as well as to the economy of Kashmir in the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Kashmiri Women, Artisans, Household, Nineteenth Century.

INTRODUCTION

Women emerged as a distinct interest group in the 19th century primarily because women were excluded from concept of equality on the basis of gender. According to Veena Mazumdar,

From the 19th century however, and particularly from the beginnings of the Indian Press, the women's question has formed one of the major issues in social debate - first among social reformers, then among the nationalists and finally, in the contemporary period, among all those who are concerned with problems of development, of growing inequality, poverty and unemployment. (Mazumdar, 1986)

Since then women as a community had to struggle for recognition of their rights. Women's execute multidimensional role in the society i.e. as a breadwinner, a care taker, mother, wife, daughter and service provider to the society. In spite of their multiple contributions they experienced number of limitations that restrain them from comprehending their potential and cognitive development. The

study of the status of women in any society must examine the social organization of the society. It is important to develop a comprehensive approach towards women's status in society. Understanding the role they play in the productive process and the control they have over the means of production. As Veena Mazumdar states,

19th century reformers, being primarily concerned with the problems of the newly emerging urban middle class, had concentrated all their concerns for women with the problems experienced by women of this class. The image of the suppressed, subjugated and secluded Indian woman - Hindu or Muslim - that preoccupied the Indian literati and their counter-parts in the west took no note of the millions of Indian women who formed the back-bone of the Indian economy, and who were far greater victims of the colonial transformation of the economy than even the men in their family. (Mazumdar, 1986)

In long 19th century, the social status of women appeared to be dependent on their male counterparts. Except women of the upper classes, the life of women from other classes was tough. They were denied the opportunity of education and other basic rights. Refinement of their various roles was denied in the name of religious and cultural norms. Precisely, the access to social justice and equality were not given to them. The women were confined in private sphere having no access to public sphere. They were unaware of their basic rights as individuals might be that due to illiteracy, economic subordination and ignorance. The major issue of concern for enlightened opinion was to give women a better social status in society. There were rigorous efforts made by reformers and activist in the abolition of sati and infanticide, in the disapproval of child marriage and polygamy and propagation of widow remarriage, in the abolition of purdha in education, facilities for women and economic opening to make them self-supporting and an equal share for women in the personal and political life by enfranchisement. The reform movement that was happening at the national level towards the upliftment of females has its impact at regional level also. It is very important to look at the condition of women at regional level also because the identity of a woman has intersectional approach. Therefore, the paper is an attempt to study the status and contribution of Kashmiri women in the economy. Their status as artisans in the world famous handicraft industry in long 19th century.

The valley of Kashmir has been the area of study due to the political process and its relation with the government. The repeated and increasing cycle of political conflict has restricted scholars from studying the social and cultural heritage of the valley. The land and the people of Kashmir have an intimate connection in the creation of arts and crafts. There have been fewer efforts to study the world famous handicraft industry with respect to women. In this culturally and naturally rich land where women are the major contributors in the production process their efforts are marginalized in the mainstream market. Resembling to women of other community and demography women of Kashmir too are victims of patriarchal mindset and practices which often confine them from having an equal status in household and economy. Women in the traditional Kashmiri society were always considered subservient to the male counterpart i.e. they remained dependent on male members of the family which hampered their personality development as an individual. (Shafi, 2002)

The 18th- 19th century Kashmir saw an increasing love for Kashmiri shawls and which became an export commodity to Europe. The shawls gradually became a symbol of nobility and elite status in Europe. (Emmett, 2018) Kashmiri handicraft especially shawls started gaining popularity in global market. Embroidery skills such as sozni, crewel, chain stitch, zalakdozi and aari and weaving techniques such as jamawaar and kani were used to create beautiful Kashmiri shawls. The basic manufacturing work was done in houses by Kashmiri women apart from helping men in fields, rearing children and doing

household chores they have a major contribution in production of shawls which is invisible in global market.

Kashmir in the 18th- 19th Century: Historical background.

Chitralkha Zutshi states, The early nineteenth-century British fascination with India, according to Arnold, has to be viewed as part of Romanticism's engagement with the region, which was enmeshed with modes of viewing, understanding, and recording its landscape that came to be ultimately perceived as part of the tropical world. (Arnold, 2015) While Kashmir was very much an aspect of Romanticism's appropriation of India, its place within the Romantic imagination was quite distinct. (Zutshi, 2009)

Kashmir, as possessing a distinct nationality, character, language, dress, and body of customs, affords much that is interesting, while its unique history and curious administration are worth careful study. The beautiful valley has been for many years a pleasure resort of Europeans. (Lawrence, 1859) The history of Kashmir can be classified in phases like early history of Hindu kings, Muslim rule, Sikh rule, Dogra rule and Jammu & Kashmir after 1947.

The Kashyapa reclaimed the land now comprising Kashmir from a vast lake. The land came to be known as Kashyapamar and later Kashmir. Later, Buddhism was introduced by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka in 3rd century BCE. A progression of Hindu dynasties ruled Kashmir until 1346 until it came under Muslim rule. The Muslim era lasted for nearly five centuries ending when Sikh kingdom of Punjab in 1819 annexed the Kashmir and then later the Dogra kingdom of Jammu in 1846. (www.britannica.com)

Terrestrial Background

The region of Kashmir is predominantly mountains with narrow and deep valleys and high barren plateaus. Whereas relatively low lying Jammu and Punch area in the southwest plains are separated by densely forested Himalayan foothills and the Pir Panjal Range of the low Himalayas from the larger, fertile and heavily populated valley of Kashmir to the north.

People

The people in the region of west Jammu are Muslims and Hindu in east and speak Hindi, Punjabi and Dogri. The inhabitants of the Valley of Kashmir are mostly Muslims and speak Urdu and Kashmiri.

Women in Traditional Kashmiri Society

Like women of any other culture and society women in traditional Kashmiri society have been subjected to dependency, inferior social status and subjugation. There have been institutional exploitation and systematic discrimination by males of the society. It was a paradoxical situation for women while their social role was projected as minimal but they actively participated in social, economic and other activities. Whereas, in urban areas, the women of elite class like Sayyid and Hojja families were completely confined to their homes and were not allowed to perform any manual labor outside home. The occupations of women furnish a subject of much interest and importance. (Khan, 1999) Largely, these women were professionally restricted to agriculture, spinning, weaving and latter to work in handicraft sectors with no formal education. These women played crucial roles. Apart from doing household chores and working in fields they actively participated in handicraft industry and were socially and economically productive but this has not given them complete economic independence and higher social status.

The past history of Jammu and Kashmir depicts that women of high caste or social status might have enjoyed an exclusive life style but there was a significant deterioration in the status of women. “Female births were not much desired and their sufferings and pains magnified with the influx of Turko-Afghan raids for whom carrying away of girls/women during battles formed the prized item of booty.” (Wani, 2021) Whereas when the Dogras (1846-1947) came into power the status of women started to even worsen. The Dogra rule saw the occurrence of other socially-suppressive activities like ban on widow remarriage, prostitution and trafficking of women etc. The Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh and his successors ruled the valley with the same mandate and ideological backing. Thus, almost all the Dogra rulers indulged in gross misgovernment. It is worthy to mention that women were subjected and treated as ‘objects’ or sort of ‘commodities’. Under the Dogra rule prostitution as legalized in Kashmir. It is strange to admit that one considerable item of revenue to the Maharaja came from such unlawful and inhuman practices, which most governments endeavor to conceal, due to the shame attached with it. (Anzoo, 2019) People who were engaged in the trade of women received lucrative amount in lieu of Kashmiri girls being sold to their clients in the markets of Punjab or British India. The girls who were sent for prostitution were usually made to believe that they would be married off. For most of the parents, marriage was not an option as the tax imposed on marriage by Dogra regime was usually very high and thus beyond the reach of the poor classes (Lawrence, 1928) Women were subjected to sexual violence and their bodies were commoditized and objectified can be understood as:

Prostitution was legitimate and was not a culpable wrongdoing in Jammu and Kashmir during Dogra rule. Prostitutes were given permit by the state, as indicated by British authority report around 15 to 25 percent of the wages of the state came from burdening these prostitutes. In 1880 there were 18715 enlisted prostitutes in Kashmir who gave away a portion of their pay to the state as assessments. (National Archive of India) The report which came in Times London, constrained British government to ask, the official on special duty in Kashmir, namely Mr. Henry to discover reality with regards to it. He submitted report: the prostitutes, who are enlisted and burdened accordingly, are chiefly of the Wattal or lower rank. They are sold at youthful age by their folks to brothel keepers for Rs 200 or Rs 100 for each youngster. This isn't just perceived yet in addition recorded on stamped paper by the public authority. The assessed number of prostitutes obtained in this manner is 250 or 300 for Srinagar. They are partitioned into three classes as per their 'delights' and were burdened as needs be. (Bamzai, 2007)

1 st Class	Company's Rs.40 per annum
2 nd Class	Company's Rs. 20 per annum
3 rd Class	Company's Rs. 10 per annum

Source: Mr. F. Henvey's Revised Note on the Famine in Kashmir (1877- 80), NAI, Foreign Department, Secret-E, March 1883, No. 86.

The registered prostitutes primarily belonged to the lower sections of society, and a significant number of them actually came from the lower classes, such as the wattal (shoe-makers), bhungies (scavengers) and hanjis (fishermen) and others. Arthur Brickman, a European missionary who visited the valley of Kashmir in 1866 and the author of *The Wrongs of Kashmir* (1868), has described the trafficking and sale of women in the Valley in following words

One considerable item of this chieftain's revenue is derived from a traffic which most countries endeavor to conceal but which flourishes openly and avowedly in Cashmere. The classes engaged in it [prostitution] are owned as slaves by others who were formerly in their position. The authority of the latter is backed by the whole power of the Maharaja, to whom reverts at their death all the wealth

gathered by the prostitutes, during their infamous life. Should one of their bondwoman or dancing girl attempted to leave her degrading profession; she is driven back with the lash and the rod into her mistress's power. These facts are certain. (Brinckman, 1973)

Household, Economy and Women

Equality is an intricate notion relative to perspective and ideologies. Its manifestation is subjected to various debates. The notion of equality is generally rationalized by social ethos and personal views. The stereotypes in male dominated realm typecast women as inferior to men because of the belief that women lack abilities and qualities that men retain and further ascribe these weaknesses to their biological phenomenon or natural endowments. Maithrayi Krishna Raj writes, "These explanations are, however, the outcome of post-hoc rationalization." She further argues,

Feed a woman less, allow her less freedom to move in fresh air, confine her to monotonous chores, deny her education and deny her exercise of her faculties and then inevitably, we have women who are frail, stupid, lacking in imagination and so on.

It is not only the organization of work that is gendered but also the cultural values with which paid work and domestic labor are associated; paid work and the workplace are largely seen as men's domain, the household as women's (Abbott, 2008) The contribution of women have always been overlooked though they have been performing many diverse roles from bread winner to doing household chores.

Women typically spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work than men. On account of gendered social norms that view unpaid care work as a female prerogative, women across different regions, socio-economic classes and cultures spend an important part of their day on meeting the expectations of their domestic and reproductive roles. This is in addition to their paid activities, thus creating the "double burden" of work for women. How society and policy makers address issues concerning care has important implications for the achievement of gender equality: they can either expand the capabilities and choices of women and men, or confine women to traditional roles associated with femininity and motherhood (Razavi, 2007). The unequal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men represents an infringement of women's rights (UN, 2013) and also a brake on their economic empowerment. (Ferrant, Maria Pesando, Nowacka, 2014)

The role of Kashmiri women in public and private has always been vital of significance. It has been seen that Kashmiri women in 18th- 19th century apart from doing household chores have been involved in agricultural sector and animal husbandry simultaneously. They have been actively involved in activities like weeding, seeding, transporting, transplanting, collecting agricultural produce and poultry. While looking at handicraft industry women have been involved in shawl manufacturing, embroidery, paper mache and other handicraft production. The final produce like shawls and paper mache products of the handicraft industry have to go through various stages and it requires time and labor both and women were the major part of this process.

The production of Kashmiri shawls began in Kashmir in the mid-fifteenth century and gathered momentum under the patronage of the Mughal emperor Akbar after his conquest of the Kashmir Valley in 1586. Until the eighteenth century, Kashmiri shawls were entirely hand-woven on looms made of wooden sticks on which the weft yarn was wound and interlaced with the warp to produce intricate patterns. (Zutshi, 2009) Kashmiri shawl weaving was never a folk textile art meant strictly for local Kashmiri consumption; it was from its very inception a commercial, court-patronized, and state-controlled enterprise aimed at the market. (Ahad, 1987) In 1846, the valley of Kashmir, and its

renowned shawl industry became part of the fast-growing British Indian Empire. (Lone, 2017) Handloom weavers in Kashmir produced this soft, warm, goat-hair fabric for a world market long before affluent western women draped their bodies with distinctive wraps. Luxurious Kashmiri shawl fabric was wound as men's turban in Egypt, stitched into wealthy Iranian women's jacket, prized for men's coat in Turkestan, worn as sashes in Tibet and gifted to both "dancing girls" and male nobles from Delhi to Istanbul. (Maskiell, 2002) The love for Kashmiri handicraft especially shawls was growing swiftly during 18th- 19th century. If observed from the weavers' perspective, the manufacturing of shawls required months of hard work by the artisans monitoring minute details and the State took the monopoly of selling these shawls to world market; the artisans had no bargaining power in the deal.

The earliest detailed account of the shawl industry in Kashmir is the one written by William Moorcraft, an enterprising man, who was commissioned by the British Government, to learn and report on the possibility of the introduction of shawl manufacturing in British India and England, during the period 1820-1830. He has written in length the details which involved the manufacture of the shawls. In the absence of any other documentary evidence regarding the number of weavers engaged in the shawl industry, one has to believe the numbers given by Moorcraft's who puts it at one hundred and twenty thousand. His details also reveals a division of labor starting from spinners who were women working in their own homes, cleaning the dirty yarn and separating the superior and inferior fleece and then spinning the yarn into the length of 2500 yards. Their work usually began at daybreak and continued the whole day if not taken off by any domestic chores. For this work these women spinners earned a nominal amount of 'three pence to half penny a day, or from three rupees to three rupees eight annas a month'. This amount is inclusive of the price of wool they bought from the market for spinning, thus leaving them with only one rupee eight annas. Before the weaving could begin, seven other specialists were involved in the work which included dyers, warp-makers, warp-dressers, warp-threader, pattern-drawer, colour-caller, and pattern-master. (Lone, 2017)

The shawl trade contributed to the state exchequer whooping revenue amounting to Rs. 6, 00,000 to 7, 00,000 per annum, it was a poor industry to the weaver. (Lawrence, 2021) A Kashmiri shawl weaver earned four annas a day, (Vigne, 2008) half of which went to the governor in the form of taxes, and the other half was expended in the purchase of the provisions, hence leaving them without any saving whatsoever. (Lone 2017) The fact that the shawl weavers lived in the state of abject poverty can be gauged from the fact that to support the family, even the children were employed in the industry as soon as they were able to use their limbs. (Baron, 1853) The girls entered the industry at the age of ten and it is said that a hundred thousand females were employed in this occupation. (Moorcraft, 1970)

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During 18th-19th century both men and women were employed in the production process. Though there has been no concrete account of the exact number of employed male or female workers during that period. From the travelogue of Bernier and George Forster, one can find that maximum number of women and children were employed to meet the increasing demand shawls and other handicraft in 18th-19th century. George Forster even says that at one stage almost the entire female population of the city of Srinagar was engaged in the profession of craft manufacture. (Bernier, 2012) Women employed in karkhanas were exploited by the employers the most. It has been seen that it was necessary for female population to take up spinning at a primary age because spinning was considered as a major economic necessity for girls. Apart from young girls, elderly ladies, widows and married women were also employed in the process of spinning. Female workers in the karkhanas increased with the increase in the demand of the Kashmiri handicrafts. An article of The New York Times dated August 16, 1881 tried to highlight the condition of workers:

Everyone knows that the cashmere shawls which figure so frequently as wedding presents from the Queen are part of the annual tribute paid by the Maharaja of Cashmere.....but everyone does not know in what dens of squalid misery, and by what a physically debilitated race these shawls are produced.....In every shawl-producing village, the physique of the wretched workers is painful to observe. Long hours of work, in crowded and illventilated rooms, with poor, nay wretched pay, have made the shawl workers of Cashmere mere shadows of men. It is absolutely painful to see their pallid faces and weak, ill-nourished forms. (The New York Times, 1881)

This deplorable situation of the shawl weavers was a result of the policies of the Dogra rule that made it mandatory for the weavers to pay more tax. Women became extremely important in the contribution of socio-economic development of Kashmir besides being an important contributor they were still found in submissive and subjugated section of society. However they were found performing well in the socio-economic growth. Their occupation outfits a subject of much significance and intrigue. Apart from preparing sustenance women were found doing tasks like that of husking, crushing grain, helping in fields and were engaged in shawl industry doing shawl weaving, spinning of pashm or wool and weaving of blankets at their home or in karkhanas. During the 18th-19th century the economy of Kashmir was agriculture and handicraft based where women were found in good numbers contributing to the economy.

Women had to take multiple roles they were responsible for running the household, bearing and rearing children and doing economic activities in addition. Women had very few rights and experienced oppression at the hands of the patriarchy. To talk about women of Kashmir in 18th-19th century they had to face multiple oppressions apart from being a regular contributor to the economy. The mutual gender relations were like any other patriarchal society. The household chores to only women's responsibility taking up any economic activity were an addition to the burden. Increased participation of women in labor market does not mean that women's experiences of work are same as men's or they both have same working patterns. Working hours, type of work of women and the return they get (in monetary terms) for their labor differ from their male counterparts. It has often been seen men supervising or controlling women. Women often take economic activities as part-time work mostly because of household responsibilities. The result of their concentration in part-time work women often do not enjoy the same employment condition or even protection of employment. Though their work is rigorous and

tiring but still they do not enjoy same perks or employment facilities as of men's. Their contribution to the economy was no less than men. But the invisibility of women in mainstream market was clearly visible.

The nineteenth century European assumption of geographical determinism, racial hierarchy and gender essentialism underpinned the seemingly disparate narrative about the designs of Asian manufactured commodities in art history and the theories about an "Asiatic mode of production" in labor history. (Maskiell, 2002)

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