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**A HISTORY OF NATURAL CALAMITIES/DISASTERS DURING THE AFGHAN  
RULE IN KASHMIR [1753-1819 A.D]**

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**Abstract**

Afghan period has been mostly studied from the angle/approach of taxation and revenue maximization. This heavy taxation coupled with the occurrence of frequent disasters in this period. The researcher looks into the primary sources to find out the calamities/ disasters which occurred in the Afghan rule. The researcher gives a chronological description of the calamities that occurred during this period; famines, epidemic, fires, earthquakes and floods. It focuses on the impact and the policy of state viz a viz these calamities/disasters. It also focusses on the response and behavior of community in disasters. In the introduction and conclusion the researcher raises some important questions pertaining to historiography of the Kashmir; the research gaps which needs to be filled.

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**Keywords:**

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**Introduction**

Afghans took away the power from Mughals in Kashmir in fifties of eighteenth century. This period was no different from the earlier period of Mughals as the rule by Governors continued in this period also. Governors were appointed from outside the Valley whose only job was to raise taxes and maximize revenue for the parent state. In this era of revenue collection and maximization Kashmir was struck by recurrent calamities and some of which turned into massive disasters. To have a complete knowledge about how the revenue system of state worked, the life style of elite and masses, the study of disasters becomes indispensable. The sources give details about the frequent loss to crop either by precipitation, floods, untimely snowfall, fires or due to absence of cultivating class, how the system of revenue worked? How the state adjusted taxes, in the absence of no or little production and what was its impact on the lives of people which in long run affected the economy, demography, culture and most important psyche of people, the disaster study

attains utmost importance. No detailed study has been done on this topic so far. Discrete information about different calamities has found place in the works of Mushtaq Ahmad Kaw in his *Agrarian System of Medieval Kashmir 1686-1819 A.D.*, R. K. Parmu in *A History of Muslim rule in Kashmir 1320-1819 A.D.* and by P. N. K Bamzai in the second Volume of his three volume *Culture and Political History of Kashmir*. The present study differs from these studies in the sense

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of being a more detailed one, and being based on disaster study models developed by experts.

### **Research Method.**

The study is based on primary sources both published and manuscripts. The researcher adopted a chronological approach to this study. Disaster impact study models are applied in the study. Study has been made in keeping in view concepts like Disaster Politics, corrosive Community. The causation model of history has been applied to the present study.

### **Results and Analysis**

#### **Famines**

In 1755 during Ahmad Shah Durrani's rule and governorship of Sukh Jiwan Mal famine was caused by excessive rains.<sup>i</sup> There was great scarcity of food and humans and animals were equally effected. Khwaja Abul Hassan Banday who was the custodian of revenue, managed to provide food crops to every home and hearth. Since in early spring peasants were idle for want of seeds. The Khawaja distributed crop seed among peasants in a uniform manner with the plan to receive back crop seed from peasants during harvest season.<sup>ii</sup> Sukh Jiwan Mal released one lakh Kharwar of grains for city people and distributed another one lakh *kharwar* as *Taqavi* among cultivators of valley.<sup>iii</sup> Slowly and steady people had to pay one *Trak* for one kharwar and one *Anna* for every extra rupee. Latter on peasants were exempted to pay.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1765 A.D. during Hakim Noor-ud-din's time the crop production was very low owing to heavy cold.<sup>v</sup> People had to suffer and famine lasted for six months.<sup>vi</sup> Heavy casualties were noticed<sup>vii</sup>.

In 1771-72 floods resulted in famine as cultivation was effected.<sup>viii</sup> It is not clear why the cultivation could not take place.

Amir Khan Jawansher's reign saw a number of calamities like earthquakes, flood and immense cold which froze river. Crops were destroyed and food scarcity was created. Many people lost their lives.<sup>ix</sup>

In Juma Khan Atokzoi's reign heavy rains and floods destroyed crops which resulted in famine as people as well as their crops were destroyed.<sup>x</sup>

During the reign of Atta Muhammad Khan fire, flood and earthquake destroyed crops as well as houses. Food became scare and famine appeared.<sup>xi</sup> A Kharwar of rice began to be sold at one rupee.<sup>xii</sup>

Famine like conditions appeared in 1805 when due to excessive cold, rivers and lakes froze and crops remained immature.<sup>xiii</sup>

During the time of Sardar Azeem Khan in 1813 due to raw cropping season famine broke out and one kharwar of paddy was sold out at @ 16 rupees. The people used meat of dead bodies as food. It lasted for two years and its effects were observed for five years.<sup>xiv</sup> Many people died of hunger and starvation.<sup>xv</sup>

### **EPIDEMICS**

The only epidemic during Afghan rule occurred in 1783 during the period of Azad Khan. It took thousands of lives, however the adjoining rural areas remained safe.<sup>xvi</sup>

### **FIRES**

In Azad Khan's period eight thousand houses were destroyed when Tankipora was set on fire. In this fire a bamboo leaf flew from one side of Vyeth to other side thus causing damage up to Qazida to Ahlmar and Habba kadal.<sup>xvii</sup>

During the reign of Abdullah Khan in 1803 several Mohallas of Saraf Kadal caught fire and were dashed to ashes.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **EARTHQUAKES**

The first earthquake that occurred during Afghan rule of Kashmir was during the time Karim Dad Khan's governorship in 1779. There was intense shaking and the dwellings of people in urban and rural areas collapsed and most of people died. The earthquake aftershocks continued for 6 months and came to halt after one year. There was temporary migration and people fled to plains.<sup>xix</sup>

Next earthquake during Afghan rule hit during the period of Azad Khan in 1784. It was confined to interior of the city. The earth shook continuously for 3 months, several houses were damaged and many people had to face death.<sup>xx</sup>

The last earthquake that occurred in Afghan rule was a terrible earthquake. It occurred during rule of Sardar Abdullah Khan in 1803. The land surface cracked at many places and houses also collapsed. Due to severity of shock some women aborted and some people died due to debris of walls.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **FLOODS**

At the very beginning of Afghan rule in 1755 Kashmir was hit by a severe flood. Untimely rains started and standing crops were destroyed. At the same time a swarm of locusts attacked the valley and destroyed the remaining crops. The result of all of this was famine and there arose a very tense situation on account of food scarcity. Both the humans beings as well as animals were equally affected by it. The cultivators has no seed or corn to again start the cultivation. Abul Hassan Bandey, the minister of the then governor Raja Sukh Jiwan Mal adopted a merciful and benevolent policy released one lakh Kharwar of grains for the people in the city and distributed one lakh kharwar as Taqavi and seeds among people.<sup>xxii</sup>

Second flood in the Afghan rule occurred during the rule of Amir Khan Jawansher in 1770.<sup>xxiii</sup> Incessant rains were the main cause of the flood. The rivers were in full spate. Many bridges, buildings collapsed and fields were destroyed. The sources give the information that the only step Amir Khan took was to protect Darabagh which was under construction. A strong fort was got constructed by Amir Khan around it.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The third flood that occurred in the Afghan period was in the time of Juma Khan Atokzoi in 1787. Qazizada dam was cracked. The northern part of the city came under water. The flood destroyed the houses and property of people.<sup>xxv</sup>

Next flood in Afghan rule occurred in the reign of Azad Khan in 1781. It was caused by the incessant rains that occurred in the last days of month of Ramdhan<sup>xxvi</sup>

The last flood that occurred in Kashmir during the Afghan rule was Kashmir during the governorship of Abdullah Khan in 1804. It was such a flood that it touched skies in river Jhelum and damaged crops.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### Conclusion

Within a short span of 66 years of Afghan rule Kashmir witnessed seven famines [some of which were moderate scarcities], two fires, one epidemic, five floods and three earthquakes. Thus eighteen calamities struck Kashmir in this period. These physically impacted Kashmir in the form of human and animal lives, further the destruction of structures, and the loss of crop and washing away of agricultural land put an enormous impact on the economy of the state. The response of State when analysed in the light of resources was almost nothing. No mitigation steps were taken and there is no reference to any sort of funds released by state for this purpose, though some calamities for a long time. Sources doesn't give any information about the community behaviour during this period except the want of food [already discussed the evidence of cannibalism] and temporary migration in times of earthquake. The overall loss to life and economy remains an area of research to be worked upon. Only an economic study will bring out a holistic view of life of Kashmiris in this period.

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- <sup>iii</sup>Kachru Birbal, *Majma' tu Tawarikh*, Research Library, Research and Publication Department, Srinagar, ff. 211 a-b
- <sup>iv</sup>Khuihami, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 315.
- <sup>v</sup>Kachru Birbal, op. cit., ff. 211 a-b.
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- <sup>vii</sup>Kachru Birbal, op. cit., ff. 211 a b.
- <sup>viii</sup>Kachru Birbal, op. cit., ff. 211 a b.
- <sup>ix</sup>Kachru Birbal, op. cit., ff. 219 a b-220 a b.
- <sup>x</sup>Kachru Birbal, op. cit., ff. 223 a b.
- <sup>xi</sup>Khuihami, Vol. 1, p. 315.
- <sup>xii</sup>Kachru Birbal, op. cit., ff. 231 a b.
- <sup>xiii</sup>Kachru Birbal, op. cit., ff. 231 a b.
- <sup>xiv</sup>Khuihami, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 315.
- <sup>xv</sup>Kachru Birbal, op. cit., ff. 235 b-237 a.
- <sup>xvi</sup>Khuihami, op. cit. p. 318.
- <sup>xvii</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>xviii</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>xix</sup>Khuihami, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 322 & Vol. 2, p. 432.
- <sup>xx</sup>Khuihami, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 322 & Vol. 2, p. 438.
- <sup>xxi</sup>Khuihami, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 322
- <sup>xxii</sup>Khuihami, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 412. Kachru Birbal., op. cit., f. 211.
- <sup>xxiii</sup>Khuihami, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 326.
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