



FAMINES IN MUGHAL KASHMIR [1586-1753A.D]

Shahid Nabi Wani*

Abstract

Famines have been one of the most recurrent disasters in Kashmir. Mughal period too witnessed a number of disastrous famines. The researcher looks into the primary sources of the period to find out the famines. The researcher demonstrates that right from the very beginning of Mughal rule famines struck the valley taking a heavy toll of life. It was the precipitation in the form of heavy rains or floods which caused these famines. As there was immense scarcity of food so the famines brought out the corrosive nature of community to fore front as there was cannibalism as well as food riots. As Kashmir in this time was integrated with the rest of sub-continent thus a number of relief measures were taken from outside the Kashmir. Famines impacted the Kashmir physically, economically and culturally, however, politically they were quite insignificant.

Keywords:

Mughal;

Famines

Kashmir;

Disasters;

Impact;

Author correspondence:

Shahid Nabi Wani,

Research Scholar, Department of History,

University of Kashmir, Hazratbal Srinagar, J&k, India.



Introduction

Mughals took control of Kashmir in 1586. It was important in this sense that Kashmir became a part of larger Mughal Empire which extended over a large part of Sub-continent. Mughal rulers would stay at the imperial capitals in sub continent and would sometimes also visit Kashmir. It were the governors appointed by Mughal rulers who would rule over the Kashmir. Thus neither the rulers nor the ruled had direct knowledge of each other. The sole job of the governors was the revenue maximization. It was in this type of political system that Kashmir was struck by frequent disastrous famines which impacted the Kashmir physically, economically, demographically as well as culturally. Famines were one of the most recurrent disasters that occurred in this period. The prime cause responsible for these famines was the precipitation in the form of excessive rainfall and floods. Anthropogenic famines turned these famines into disasters.

The only study based on primary sources so far done on this topic is by Mushtaq Ahmed Kaw in his work *Agrarian System of Medieval Kashmir*. The present study differs from that in the sense that it not only makes a chronological study along with state response but studies these famines as disasters, applying the methodological tools used by disasterologists.

Research Method

The research is based on primary sources. The researcher has made use of disaster impact study models. The concept of corrosive community used by Sociologists has been applied to this study. The historical causation model of direct, indirect causes and concept of cause of causes; i.e. the hierarchy of causes has been used.

Results and Analysis

In 1597 A.D at the time of Akbar's third visit to Kashmir there was a famine due to untimely rains.ⁱ AbulFazl writes that it was on account of the deficiency of rains.ⁱⁱ There was already food scarcity on account Mughal-Chak infightings and by coming of around 25,000 troops prior to it. Father Xavier who accompanied Akbar has given an account of situation. In this famine we see first evidence that parents were willing even to convert and some converted [baptised by Xavier] their children so that their life could be saved.ⁱⁱⁱ Akbar ordered 12 places be prepared in city to feed people. Every Sunday a proclamation was made in Eidgah and applicants were bestowed with food; 80,000 received hearts desires, some got livelihood by means of labour in construction of fort.^{iv}

In Shah Jahan`s reign the decade of 1640`s saw a number of calamities. In 1642kharif crops were destroyed by winds which resulted in a severe famine.^v It was followed by a flood which again created famine like conditions. In 1643 A.D there was again crop failure. Again a famine struck Kashmir in 1651.^{vi} According to Didamari it occurred between 1647 to 1651. Owing to these calamities many people migrated to other parts of India. It is said 30,000 people took refuge in



Lahore and requested Shah Jahan for help.^{vii} The worst hit were cultivators who lost everything even seed for renewing cultivation. Many people died for paucity of food, Shah Jahan sent cereals from Gujarat, Multan and Lahore. *Mohsileen* and *Sazawal* were appointed for this.^{viii} Shah Jahan along with other wealthy people sent personal donations for sufferers.^{ix} He even ordered that Royal princes, Begams and wealthy should also make more charity to Kashmiris, who come to Darbar.^x According to Sadiq khan Rs. 30,000 latter supplemented by another Rs. 20,000 were sent as relief.^{xi}

During Aurangzeb's reign under the governorship of Hafiz ullah Khan heavy and untimely snow destroyed standing crops^{xii} which led to famine of great intensity.^{xiii} There was decrease in production of crops and people had to suffer and whole country was unstable.^{xiv} Aurangzeb provided Rs. 70,000 as relief for needy^{xv} but this could not reach the people as benefits were taken by corrupt and unscrupulous officials.^{xvi}

During the governorship of Ibrahim khan [1677-1678] floods and earthquakes resulted into a famine.^{xvii}

During Nawazish Khan's governorship floods again resulted into a severe famine.^{xviii}

In 1713 heavy rains again resulted in famine.^{xix}

During rule of Muhammad Shah three famines struck Kashmir. In the governorship of Azam khan in 1723 excessive rains resulted in famine though this had started in Governorship of AbulBarkat khan but it turned serious under Azam Khan. One *kharwar* of rice was sold at Rs. 80 and sometimes it wasn't available even at this price. Many people had to face death due to soaring prices. Famine lasted for six months and its effects were felt for two years.^{xx}

During the governorship of Ahtiram khan in 1730 famine was caused due to un ripening of crops. Ahtiram Khan at the instigation of wealthy people manhandled everyone for the sake of food crops creating disturbances throughout city. People partly due to uncertainty and partly under influence of evil mongers got out of control.^{xxi} This event marks the first food riot in Kashmir, when public revolted for the sake of food; slogans were raised and there was hue and cry which forced officials to accompany them up to Jamia Masjid where they were killed; according to Didamari the two officials killed were great scholars of time, Maulana Mohammad Ashraf, the grand *Mufti* and Maulana Inayatullah, the *Daroga Sharia court*.^{xxii} Further houses were looted and some set ablaze on the pretext of being grain hoarders.^{xxiii} Situation was further aggravated by the exploitation of black marketers and hoarders.^{xxiv}

Again in 1736 / 1149 under governorship of DilDiler khan people created disturbances revolted due to scarcity of food.^{xxv}

Next famine occurred in 1745-46 during the governorship of Afrasiyab Khan partly due to incessant and sometimes deficient rain^{xxvi} and partly due to loot by Bombas and revolt by Babrullah Khan. Even if there was something available it was kept hidden by peasants.^{xxvii}



People sold their ornaments at cheap rates^{xxviii} but still could not get 2 Kg rice in hand^{xxix} Even state also purchased grain from dealers at high prices^{xxx} Many people lost their lives and dead bodies were covered with grass latter they were eaten by dogs, cats and flying birds and Jhelum was filled with dead bodies.^{xxxi} There were incidents of cannibalism. One-third of lives were lost, one-third migrated to other places leaving one-third to live there. A person was not sold in more than 2 to 3 *tankas*. The famine lasted for more than seven months. (from Rabi ulAwal to Ramdhan) Cotton seed and every green thing was thought to be like one has got the best food^{xxxii}. Next year there was so much scarcity that one *kharwar* was sold @ 7 Rs.^{xxxiii} this was followed by another famine two years later which again took a heavy toll of life.^{xxxiv}

Conclusion.

Mughal rule witnessed a number of disastrous famines in Kashmir. The precipitation can be called as causal force which caused these famines. However, the mishandling on the part of state and the corrosive nature of community aggravated the disastrousness of the famines. Primarily there was shortage of food and it led to death and economic collapse. Thus there was physical or demographic impact in the form of loss of lives and this led to economic impact. In the long run the famines culturally impacted the Kashmiris. Famines led to cannibalism and food riot in this period, which showed the signs of corrosiveness which existed deep in the society. Politically the famines in this period turned to be quite insignificant and except transfer of few governors nothing politically noticeable happened in this period.

References

ⁱKhuihami, Hassan., *Tarikh I Hassan*, Eng. Translation by A.R. Khan, City Book Centre, Srinagar, 2015 Vol. 1, p. 313.

ⁱⁱFazalAbul, *Akbar Nama, History of the Reign of Akbar including an account of his predecessors*, English translation by H. Beveridge, The Asiatic society, Calcutta, 1939, reprint 2000, Vol. III p.1087.

ⁱⁱⁱJarric, S.J, Father Pierre., *Akbar and the Jesuits*, Edited by E Denison Ross and Eileen Power, Translated with Introduction and notes by C. H. Payne, Harper and Brothers, New York and London, 1926.pp.77-78.

^{iv}FazalAbul, op. cit., p.1089.

^vKhuihami, Hassan., op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 313.

^{vi}KachruBirbal, *Majma't at Tawarikh*, Research Library, Srinagar. P. ff.153-154.

^{vii}Lahori, Abdul Hamid, *Badshah Nama*, Abdl Al Rahim, Asiatic Society of Bemgal, Calcutta, 1868/1887, Vol II. pp. 302 303.

^{viii}Didamari, Mohammad Azam, *Waqiat e Kashmir* Urdu translation by Khawaja Hameed Yazdani, Jammu and Kashmir Ilamic research centre, sinagar, 1997, p. 291.

^{ix}Khuihami, Hassan., op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 313.

^xDidamari, op. cit. p. 291.



^{xi}Sadiq Khan, *Tarikh-i-Shahjahani*, Or. 174, British MuesemRotograph no 39, Centre of Advanced Studies Aligarh, f 98a.

^{xii}KazimMohamamd, *Alamgir Nama*, ed. Khadim Hussain and Abudul Hai, Bib. Ind., Calcutta, 1912-46. Vil. II p. 830.

^{xiii}KachruBirbal, op. cit., ff 177 a-b.

^{xiv}Khuihami, Hassan., op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 313.

^{xv}KazimMohamamd, *Alamgir Nama*, op. cit., p. 830.

^{xvi}Lahori, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 282, 309 & 310. Op. cit., Sadiq Khan, p. 174 f.

^{xvii}Didamari, op. cit. p. 371

^{xviii}Didamari, op. cit. p. 444.

^{xix}KachruBirbal., op. cit., f. 177 a b.

^{xx}Khuihami, Hassan., op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 313. Didamari., op. cit., pp. 496-501.

^{xxi}Didamari, op. cit., p. 514

^{xxii}Didamari, op. cit., p. 514

^{xxiii}Khuihami, Hassan., op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 314.

^{xxiv}KachruBirbal, op. cit., ff 186 a b.

^{xxv}Didamari, op. cit., pp. 524-525.

^{xxvi}Didamari, op. cit., p. 541.

^{xxvii}Didamari, op. cit., p. 541

^{xxviii}Khuihami, Hassan., Vol. 1, p. 314.

^{xxix}Didamari, op. cit., p. 544.

^{xxx}Mirhjanpuri Khalil, *Tarikh-i-Kashmir*, Research and Publications Deptt. Srinagar, . f. 167.

^{xxxi}Didamari., op. cit., p. 544.

^{xxxii}Didamari., op. cit., p. 544

^{xxxiii}Khuihami, Hassan., op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 314. KachruBirbal, op. cit., pp ff 211 a b.

^{xxxiv}KachruBirbal, op. cit., pp ff 199 a & 220 b