

Mughal Emperor Jahangir on the History and Culture of Kashmir: Water resources & Places



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The Mughal emperor Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (1556-1605) annexed Kashmir to the Mughal empire in 1586 and it remained under the Mughals upto 1753. The Mughal emperor Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir treated Kashmir as most favourite part of the Mughal India. Since he was a naturalist, Kashmir's natural heritage became the sources of his inspiration and creativity. Though all the Mughal emperors from 1586 onwards worked for the protection and propagation of historical and cultural heritage of Kashmir, Jahangir's methods and approach for drawing the attention of people towards Kashmir's history and culture were unique. He visited Kashmir frequently. He treated Kashmir virtually the summer capital of the Mughal empire. However, during his visit to Kashmir he generally collected information regarding the historicity of the places, productions, population and natural features of the region. He recorded the historical facts of Kashmir in his Memoirs entitled Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri. It is written in Persian language by Jahangir.

Jahangir records the historical places, natural resources, social life and phases of changes in Kashmir in a very convincing and interesting manners. He mentions that Bihat (Jhelam) river flowed very fast and during rainy season generally the bridges on it were broken. Jahangir was very much impressed from the cultural importance of the Veri-Nag or Vir-nag spring. Therefore, he tried to know the people's perception about it and he himself went there and assessed its value in terms of a water resource. According to him, "The source of Bihat is a spring in Kashmir called the Vir-nag; in the language of India a snake is Vir-nag. Clearly there had been a large snake at that place. I went twice to the spring in my father's lifetime; it is 20 kos from the city of Kashmir. It is an octagonal reservoir about 20 yards by 20. Near it are the remains of a place of worship for recluses; cells cut out of the rock and numerous caves. The water is exceedingly pure. Although I could not guess its depth, a grain of poppy seed is visible until it touches the bottom. There were many fish to be seen in it. As I heard that it was unfathomable. I ordered to throw in a cord with a stone attached, and when this cord was measured in gaz it became evident that the depth was not more than one and half the height of a man. After my accession I ordered them to build the sides of the spring round with the stone, and they made a garden round it with a canal; and built halls and houses about it, and made a place such that travellers over the world can point out few like it." (The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, English Translation by Alexander Rogers, edited by Henry Beveridge, Delhi, 1994 (Reprint), Vol. I, p. 92). For Jahangir, the streams and springs of Kashmir provided

plenty of water to the people of the region. But for drinking purpose Dal lake water was used by the most of the people of Kashmir. Jahangir also gives a brief description of the Wulur lake. For him its length and breadth were more than three or four kos and was also called Zainlanka.

Jahangir worked for the preservation and publicity of springs and fountains of Kashmir. One can estimate the extent of Jahangir's interests in these water resources from their mention in his Memoirs. When he visited a fountain of Inch village he recorded the characteristics of it in these words: "I first visited the fountain of Inch. This village had been given by my father to Ram Das Kachhwaha and he had erected buildings and basins at the spring. Undoubtedly, it is exceedingly sweet and delightful place. Its water is perfectly clear and pure, and many fish swim in it." The fountain of the Machhi Bhawan and the spring of Achhabal attracted the attention of Jahangir very much. The latter not only described the attractive features of these, but also evaluated the historical value of them. Appreciating the significance of Machhi Bhawan fountain as an important source of enjoyment Jahangir writes, "...there is a fountain that they (Kashmiris) call Machhi Bhawan, above which Ray Bihari, one of the servants of my father (Akbar), built an idol temple. The beauty of this spring is more than one can describe, and large trees of ancient years, planes, white and black poplars, have grown up round it."

Regarding Achhabal spring Jahangir writes, "The water of this spring is more plentiful than that of other, and it has a fine waterfall. Around it lofty plain trees and graceful white poplars, bringing their heads together, have made enchanting places to sit in. As far as one could see, in a beautiful garden, Ja'fari flowers had bloomed, so that one might say it was a piece of Paradise." Similarly, Jahangir records the springs of Loka Bhawan and Andha Nag. According to him, "This spring (Loka Bhawan) is a pleasant spot. Although at present it is not equal to the others, if it were to be repaired it would be very good. I ordered them to construct a building worthy of place and to repair the reservoir in front of it." But Jahangir found the Andha Nag a spring which water was not good for the health. He not only heard about the poor quality of the water, but also witnessed it. He writes, "It is known that the fish of this fountain (Andha Nag) are blind. I delayed a while near this spring, and threw in a net and caught twelve of the fish. Of these, three were blind and nine had eyes. Evidently, the water of this spring has effect of making them blind. Certainly this is not devoid of strangeness."

Jahangir's description of the some of the places of Kashmir highlights the historical significance of them. He traces the history of Shihabuddinpur village of Kashmir. According to him, "This village is one of the celebrated

places of Kashmir and is on the Bihat. About a hundred plain trees (chinar) of graceful form clustered together on one plot of ground, pleasant and green, join each other so as to shade the whole plot and the whole surface of ground is grass and trefoil; so much so that to lay a carpet on it would be superfluous and in bad taste. The village was founded by sultan Zainul Abidin..." It is important to mention that the Sultan Zainul Abidin (1420-70) was the most enlightened ruler of the fifteenth century Kashmir and immensely promoted building industries in Kashmir. Jahangir's mention of Shihabuddinpur village in historical perspective shows how much the Mughal emperor was concerned with the processes of the historical changes in Kashmir.

When Jahangir visited Bara Mula town he asked the people what was the meaning of Bara Mula? The people of that area told him that Bara Mula was derived from Hindi language. It was made of two words; first Barah or Varah which means boar, and second Mula which means place. Thus Bara Mula means place of boars. According to him, "Among the incarnations that belong to the religion of the Hindus, one is the boar incarnation, and Barah Mula by constant use has become Baramula...It is one of the noted towns of Kashmir, and 14 koss distant from the city, situated on the bank of the Bihat. A number of the merchants of Kashmir live in it, and have built houses and mosques on the bank of the river, and spend their days in ease and contentment. Jahangir mentions the village of Pampur as the producer of the largest quantity of the saffron (Zafran). The places such as Buliyasa, Qambarbar, Srinagar and Panj Brara are mentioned by Jahangir with reference to the potentialities of cultural development.

Jahangir's account of the geography of Kashmir is very useful for the study of the historical geography of the region. He has not only shown the different places of Kashmir in terms of topography, climate and production, but, more importantly, he has also described the several places of Kashmir in terms of the distance of one place to the other and the administrative division of Kashmir. Measuring the distance of one place to the other Jahangir writes, "Kashmir, from the place of Bhuliyasa to Qambarbar, is 56 Jahangiri koss long, and its breadth is never more than 27 koss, or less than 10 koss. Shaikh Abul Fazl (a court historian of the Mughal emperor Akbar) has, in his Akbarnama, stated, by guess and conjecture, that the length of Kashmir from the Kishan Ganga to Qambarbar is 120 koss, and its breadth from 10 to 25 koss. I, out of prudence and caution, appointed a number of trustworthy and intelligent men to measure the length and breadth with ropes (tanab). The result was that what the Shaikh (Abul Fazl) wrote as 120 koss came out as 67. As it is agreed that the boundary of country (Kashmir) is the place up to which people speak the language of that country, it follows that the boundary of Kashmir is Buliyasa, which 11 koss on this side (i.e. east) of the Kishan Ganga. So according to the preceding figures, the length of Kashmir is 56 (67-11) koss. The variations in breadth were found to be not more than 2 koss. The koss that in use during my reign is that prescribed by my father. That is a koss is 5000 yards and the yard is 2 shar'i yards, each of the latter (yards) being 24 digits (angusht)."

Jahangir found Srinagar as the most attractive and well-planned city of Kashmir. He has recorded the existing features of Srinagar City. He describes the dominant features of Srinagar in these words: "The name of the city is Srinagar, and the Bihat river flows through the midst of it. They call its fountain-head Vir-nag. It is 14 koss to the south. By my (Jahangir) order they have made a building a building and a garden at that source. There have been built in the city four very strong stone and wooden bridges, over which people come and go. They call a bridge in the language of this country kadal. There is a very lofty mosque in the city, one of the marks of Sultan Sikandar, made in 795 (Hijri) (1393 A.D.). After some time it was burnt, but was rebuilt by Sultan Husain. It had not been completed when the mansion of his life fell down. In 909 (1503-04) Ibrahim Maqri, Vizier of the Sultan Husain, finished it handsomely. From that day till now it is 120 years since it has been in existence. From the Mihrab to the eastern wall it is 145 yards, and its breadth is 144 yards, containing four (taq) alcoves. On all sides of the hall they erected beautiful cloisters and pillars. In short, no better memorial of the rulers of Kashmir has been left than this. Mir Sayyid Ali of Hamdan (may his grave be sanctified!) was for some time in this city. There is monastery to his memory. Near the city there are two large lakes full of water the year round. Their flavour does not vary; they are the means of coming and going of the people, and for the conveyance of grain and firewood on boats. In the city and parganas there are 5700 boats and 7400 boatmen."

Jahangir provides very useful and interesting information regarding the administrative divisions of Kashmir, its mode of the payment of revenue and routes between Punjab and Kashmir. According to him, "The country of Kashmir has thirty eight parganas. It is divided into two provinces; the territory on the upper part of the river they call Marraj and

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that on the lower Kamraj. Regarding the mode of payment of revenue he writes: "It is not the custom to use gold and silver for the payment of the revenue from land or in commerce, except for a portion of the cesses (sa'ir-jihat). They (Kashmiris) reckon the value of things in kharwars of rice, each kharwar being three maunds and eight seers of the current weight. The Kashmiris reckon two seers as one maund and four maunds or eight seers make one tark. The revenue of Kashmir is 3063050 kharwars and 11 tarks, which in cash represents 7 4670000 dams. (dams were copper coins and 40 dams were equivalent to one rupee)." Jahangir's account shows that it was not easy to enter Kashmir because of the existence of a few and difficult routes between the Punjab and Kashmir. However, he has given two routes, Bhimber and Pakli, through which one could enter Kashmir. For him, "Though that by Bhimbar is the shorter, yet if one wishes to find spring in Kashmir, he is confined to the road by Pakli, for other roads at this season are blocked with snow."

Jahangir's description of the various features of the different places of Kashmir indicates that the Mughal emperor had very minutely and sincerely observed those features of Kashmir which were rare in other parts of India. According to him, "Kashmir is a garden of eternal spring, or an iron fort to a

palace of kings-a delightful flower-bed, and heart expanding heritage for dervishes. Its pleasant meads and enchanting cascades are beyond all description. There are running streams and fountains beyond count. Wherever the eye reaches, there are verdure and running water. The red rose, the violet, and the narcissus grow of themselves; in the fields, there are all kinds of flowers and all sorts of sweet scented herbs more than can be calculated. In the soul enchanting spring the hills and plains are filled with blossoms; the gates, the walls, the courts, the roofs are light up by the torches of banquet-adorned tulips."

Jahangir's interests in the water resources and historical places show that the Mughals were very much conscious of the preservation of the natural heritage of Kashmir. The Mughal emperor acted as a conservator of the resources. He identified these resources having potentialities of the socio-economic development. Moreover, he also provides the popular perception of these resources. Jahangir's interests in these resources brought rich dividends to the people of Kashmir in terms of constructive activities. By recording the features of the water resources and historical places Jahangir acted as the propagator of the concept of the protection of heritage of Kashmir to create social consciousness towards them.