

Zain ul Abdin, an era of peace and prosperity in Kashmir

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ABSTRACT:

During the 14th century, an important change happened in social and cultural life of Kashmir as the roots of Islamic rule thrived in Kashmir during this era and among Muslim rulers of Kashmir Zain ul Abdin became master of new and unified Kashmir irrespective of religion caste and creed. Sultan Zain ul Abdin played a great role for the development of Kashmir almost in all aspects and no other ruler of ShahMir dynasty did so much as he did during his tenure. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the overall reforms during the ruling period of Zain ul Abdin.

KEYWORDS: *Monuments, religion, tolerance, welfare, education, crafts, justice.*

INTRODUCTION:

The first Muslim dynasty of Kashmir known as Shahmir dynasty was founded by Shah Mir in 1339 A.D. who took the title of Sultan Shams Ud Din. This period is important in the long annals of Kashmir in as much Islam was firmly planted on its soil and the people of Kashmir acquired ascendancy in art literature, construction, religion etc, during the period of Zain ul Abdin one of the most able sovereign of Shahmir dynasty.ⁱ His real name was Shady Khan and took throne under the title of Zain Ul Abdin.ⁱⁱ Zain ul Abdin was the eighth ruler of Shahmir dynasty who ruled for a period of 50 years from 1420 to 1470 A.D. His ruling period witnessed the great development of peace, prosperity and benevolent rule throughout his kingdom. He promoted learning music painting and made Kashmir the centre of great culture. He won the loyalty and affection and affection of his subjects who called hm Bud shah or the Great King, a name by which he is remembered even today by the people of Kashmir. Like his predecessors, Zain ul Abdin is not noted for stirring military conquests, for he was not inclined to wage wars for self-admiration, his main interest lay in developing the welfare of his subjects.ⁱⁱⁱ He devoted himself in decorating Kashmir with buildings and in order to humour all the nations of the world, he paid attention neither to infidelity nor Islam. It was his reign that Kashmir became a city which it had remained to this day^{iv} and cultivated the society of all classes.^v

DISCUSSION: (Reforms of Zain ul Abdin).

Public works: in the matter of architecture Zain ul Abdin might be called as the Shahjahan of Kashmir. Many important buildings and townships the remains of many of which may still be traced e.g Zaina lank, Zaina kot, Zaina pattan, Zaina kundal, Zaina math, Zaina por, Zaina tilak, Zaina gir, Zaina gam testify to his great passion for architecture and town planning. He built rest

places for the convenience of people in every parganas by the roadsides thereby forestalled the Safavi kings of Iran and the Sur rulers of Hindustan.^{vi}

The Sultan laid down magnificent building at Zainagir with the name as Zainadab which later was burned down by Chaks and also laid several gardens there.^{vii} Zainadab was twelve stories high, with fifty rooms at each story and in each room five hundred people could sit.^{viii} He also built an artificial island at Wular lake with the name of Zaina Lank, ad tow islands at Dal Lake named as Sona Land, Rupa Lank. He built the first wooden bridge in Kashmir at Jehlum River in Srinagar named as Zaina Kadal. For the health concern of people the Sultan opened number of health centres with supply of medicines free of cost. He also flourished agricultural activities built islands of floating type on which crops were sown and bought large amount of barren land under cultivation.^{ix} The Sultan also paid great attention to the irrigation system by making number of tanks, canals and dams. The Lachhamkul canal carried the water of river Sind to his founded city Nowshehra.^x The other noted canals built by Sultan were Utpalpur, Nandashaila, Bijbhira, Advin, Amburher, Zaingir.^{xi} Owing to these irrigation works, the draining of marshes and the reclamation of large areas for cultivation, Kashmir become self-sufficient in food and rice was cheap.^{xii} Moorcraft mentions that in the time of Zain ul Abdin the annual produce of rice crop is said to have been seventy seven lakhs ass loads (Kharwars) equal to sixteen Tarakhs.^{xiii} No other ruler of Kashmir had the success which he had setting the population and in expanding the cultivation and in excavating canals and water courses.^{xiv}

Arts and Crafts: Sultan Zainul Abdin extended munificent patronage to foreign arts and crafts. During his period the peace that was prevailing in Kashmir attracted master artisans from Samarkand, Bukhara, and Persia. The Sultan provided them all amenities of life and they popularised their arts and crafts among the people of Kashmir.^{xv} During those days no one in Kashmir knew these arts and craft stuff, the sultan sent two intelligent and sharp witted persons to Samarqand on the expenses of state exchequer. They stayed in Samarqand for few years. One of them learnt the craft of paper-making and the other learnt book-binding. After attaining perfection in their respective crafts, they returned to their native land where they popularized their newly learnt crafts among people.^{xvi} Stone polishing, stone cutting, glass blowing, window cutting, wood carving, paper making, gold and silver leaf making, book binding, paper mache, shawl and carpet waving whose beauty and excellence have rendered Kashmir famous. Mirza Haider Dughlat upon his invasion of Kashmir was struck by the artistic development put forwarded by Zain ul Abdin in Kashmir. Mirza Haider quoted, in Kashmir one meets with all those arts and crafts which are in most cities uncommon in the whole of Mavara u Nahr except Samarqand and Bukhara, these are nowhere to be met with, while in Kashmir they are abundant, this is all due to Zain ul Abdin.^{xvii}

Zain ul Abdin turned Kashmir into a smiling garden of industries, inculcating in the hearts of the people sane conceptions of labour and life and also implanting in their minds the germs of real progress. He introduced correct measures ad weight and made artisans and traders take solemn oath not to kill their golden goose by cheating and swindling. He thus promoted commercial morality and industrial righteousness which constitute the backbone of the people's credit and reputation. The motto of the Kashmiri's traders was "**Bazigaras chheh Bazi Garas**" a Kashmiri phrase means, a swindler swindles his own house. It was through these virtues and efficiency of Zain Ul Abdin that the art craft and other industries flourished globally even when the communication of Kashmir with the world was very difficult.^{xviii}

Education: Zain ul Abdin was the favourite son of his father and it is because of this that he received a good education at home.^{xxix} He took great interest in the field of education in Kashmir. He opened a school near his palace at Naushahr and placed this school in charge of Mulla Kabir. Sometimes he himself used to go there to attend the lectures of Kabir Mulla. For its maintenance and for granting scholarship to deserving students he created an endowment with the Mulla as its trustee. This school served till 17th century. Another place where education was imparted was the hospice of Shiekh Ismail Kubravi, to learn from him the students came from outside worlds such as Heart and Transoxiana. At places such as Sir in Islamabad and at Sialkot the Madarasas were set up and also hostels were set up for free for poor students to live in.^{xx} The unique contribution of the Sultan towards educational reforms was the introduction of the Mother tongue as the medium of teaching. His subjects comprised Kashmiri's and Non Kashmir's. The Kashmiri's masses were mostly illiterate while the educated among them used Sanskrit as their medium for writing and reading. The non Kashmiri's who were Muslims mostly from Samarqand, Bukhara, Khurasan, spoke and wrote in Persian. Himself a proficient linguist knowing Sanskrit, Kashmiri, Tibetan and Persian, the Sultan seems to have realised the one could receive best education in his own mother tongue.^{xxi} The love of the Sultan for learning is well known in Kashmir, he realised that learning for which Kashmir was noted from the earliest times, needed to be encouraged so that the land of Sarada might again shine forth as the fountain of the knowledge and learning, for this purpose he set up numerous school colleges and residential universities. His interest in the intellectual growth and development of his subjects was keen and unflagging and his extended his patronage to scholars is an unstinted measure as he did to artisans and craftsmen.^{xxii}

Sultan Zain ul Abdin was very fond of books and spent ample amount of money in collecting them. Before his accession to the throne the number of Persian and Arabic manuscripts in Kashmir was not vastly present, he therefore sent his agents to India, Iraq, Turkistan to purchase them. Sanskrit manuscripts were also purchased in large numbers. The Sultan was not only a patron of learned men, he was himself a scholar and poet. He knew Sanskrit, Persian, and Tibetan besides his mother tongue Kashmiri. The Sultan is said to have been the author of two works in Persian and wrote under pen name Qutb, one of them was on the manufacture of fireworks, and other work was titled as Shikiyat in which he discussed the vanity and briefness of world after he got disillusioned by the revolt of his sons and disloyalty of his ministers.^{xxiii}

Patronage of learning: The sultan was a great patron of learning and surrounded himself with learned men with whom he was fond of holding discussions. he conferred upon them the grants of land and other privileges, attracted by his patronage scholars like Syed Mohammad Rumi, Syed Ahmed Rumi, Qazi Ali shirazi, Syed Muhammd Luristani, Qazi Jamal and Syed Muhammad Sistani left their countries and emigrated to Kashmir during Zain ul Abdin. Qazi Jamal who came from Sind was made as Qazi by the Sultan and Maulana Kabir was worked as the tutor of the Sultan. Mulla Ahmed was a court poet and was much respected by the Sultan. Jonaraj and Srivara, authors of Sanskrit chronicles, were also greatly trusted by the Sultan and constantly remained in attendance. Yodhabhatta, another courtier of the Sultan was not only a great Vedic scholar but was also conversant with Persian and had learned the Shahnama of Firdosui by heart. He wrote a book on music and a play in Kashmiri verse named Jainaprakasha giving an account of his master's reign. Notthosoma Pandit was another Kashmiri poet who composed a book in Kashmiri verse called as Jainaacharita in which he describes the life and achievements of Zain ul Abdin. Another admirable person Bhattavatara wrote Jainavilasa which highlights the sayings of Zain ul Abdin.

Mansur Muhammad a great scholar wrote Kifaya i Mujahidiyyah , a work on medicine which he dedicated to the Sultan.

Zain ul Abdin set up a translation centre in which Persian works were translated into Sanskrit and Sanskrit into Persian. In this way knowledge was made accessible to those who knew either of these languages. Srivara translated the work of Jami Yusuf u Zulaikha into Sanskrit during Zain ul Abdin and completed it in 1505 A.D. and named it Katha-Kautuka. Mulla Ahmed who was a scholar of both Persian and Sanskrit translated Mahabharata and the Rajatarangini of Kalhan into Persian by the orders of Zain ul Abdin.^{xxiv} The Sultan spent huge amount of money sent his officials to distant places to collect literature and thus collected a library which compared favourably with the one collected by Samanids. The library remained intact down to the days of Fath Shah, approximately for a period of 100 years after which it perished.^{xxv}

Music and dance: The music bloomed and came into vogue during the reign of Zain Ul Abdin.^{xxvi} He was a great lover of music and other fine arts. He always made generous allowances to musicians. Hearing of the Sultans' generosity and of his love for music, many reputed people in this art flocked to Kashmir from outside. One such artist was Mulla Udi of Khorasan. He played on Ud to the great delight of the Sultan and his courtiers. Another master was Mulla Jamal who was a great expert in vocal music. Srivara the author of Jaina-Rajatarangini was also an accomplished musician ad he used to entertain the king offer and the king would always reward him for his fine performance.^{xxvii}

On hearing of the Sultans taste for music, the ruler of Gopilapura (Gwalior) Tugaraseha sent a book named Sangitachudamani, comprising rules of singing, of fine arts and singing and also containing best songs.^{xxviii} It was thus indeed due to Zain ul Abdin that music in Kashmir reached a high pitch of excellence. The Sultan also reintroduced the art of drama and dancing which had suffered due to the strictness of his father Sikander. Many actors and dancers both men and women came to Kashmir at his invitation and the king would hold special festival for their performances. Festivals and fairs were held at various places in Kashmir, at Pampore, Bijbihara, Ananatnag, Baramulla, Magam etc and the king would grace these occasions with his presence.^{xxix}

Religious toleration: Zain ul Abdin will always be known in history for his high sense of religious toleration. Living in an age where religious persecutions were the order of the day, his reign shines out as a bright gem amidst the narrow minded and short-sighted rulers of his time. He made Kashmir the real paradise in which people of all religion and nationalities mingled together and shared the joy and sorrows of one another.^{xxx} One of the outstanding features of the reign of Zain Ul Abdin was the just and liberal treatment that was meted out to the non-Muslims. The Sultan allowed the Hindus complete freedom of worship, and recalled those who had fled to Jammu and Kishtwar during the tenure of his father Sikander on grounds of religious intolerance. He even permitted those Brahmans who had become Muslim under duress to return to the former religion. He banned cow slaughter and gave Hindus the right to perform Sati and other customs which had been prohibited by his father. He not only permitted the repair and rebuilding of the temples destroyed in the time Sikander, but in some cases he himself repaired and rebuilt them. He gave rent free lands to Brahmans, endowed temples and did not resume the grants made in the time of rajas. Sultan Sikander imposed two pals of Silver as Jizya upon Non –Muslims, realising that it was heavy burden; Zain ul Abdin on the advice of Siryabhat reduced it to the normal amount of one Masha of Silver.^{xxxi} Siryabhat, a Brahman physician was persuaded to treat the Sultan, his treatment proved

successful but he refuses to accept any reward. He was selfless; his only anxiety was the future of well-being of the Hindus. All he asked for was that the Hindus may be rehabilitated and the revival of Brahmanical religion.^{xxxii}

The Sultan also cancelled another exaction which fell only upon the Hindus. The Hindus of Srinagar had to pay a tax to the owner of the land near the junction of the Mar canal and the Jehlum where they cremated their dead, when the Sultan was informed of this he at the request of the Srivara abolished it. The Sultan in order to win the goodwill of his Non-Muslim subjects participated in their festivals. Thus when the monks of Sri Jain monastery celebrated the worship of vessels, he took part in it and fed the monks. Similarly every year on the day of Nagayatra and during the festival of Ganacakra he fed the devotees for five days with rice, meat, vegetables and fruits. During his reign Non-Muslims held high positions and were trusted by him. He chooses his officials on the basis of their ability not on the basis of their religion. Sivabhatta a Brahman who was his physician and a confidant whom he always consulted on important matters. Another person who was his counsellor and stood high in his favour Tilakacarya, a Buddhist. Two other Brahmans Simha and Rupyabhatt were the court astrologers. Karpurabhatta was a Brahman physician much respected by the Sultan. Siryabhatta was the superintendent of the King's court of justice. The Sultan was much attached to him that on his death he distributed a large sum on money in charity.^{xxxiii}

Zain ul Abdin cultivated the society of all classes and in his assemblies men of intellect both Hindus and Muslims were always present. The Sultan took an agreement from Brahmans that they would not act in contravention of what was written in their books. After which he restored all their customs such as making of sectarian march, the Sati system which were earlier abolished by Sultan Sikander.^{xxxiv} Zain ul Abdin and his father Sikander were of contrasting temperaments. Inable to deed history can give few examples where the policy of the father was so completely reversed by the son and was the case with Sikander and Zain Ul Abdin. Where the Sultan Sikader destroyed and Zain ul Abdin restored, where the former banished, the latter recalled. As Sikander had affinities with Aurangzeb, so Zain Ul Abdin has been compared with Akbar.^{xxxv}

Justice, Law and order: After religious reforms the Sultan turned his attention to the reform of the judiciary. Law courts had of late become hotbeds of corruption and the chaos was prevailing everywhere like theft, highway robberies, drunkenness and an inefficient justice system before Zain Ul Abdin. Such a state of affair was unjust and cruel in the eyes of Sultan. He loved and practised even-handed justice and did not forgive even his son, minister, or friend if they were guilty. His judicial advisers comprised men of integrity and ability, as the final court of appeal, he heard cases a give decisions with the advice of Qazis and Pandits. He administered punishments and rewards with due regard to the merits of each case and took the same care of his subject's welfare as a husband-man takes for his crops. To keep the watch over the actions of his officers and his subjects, he set up the department of intelligence, thus he was to purge corruption and bribery.^{xxxvi}

The Sultan provided his subjects with a code of laws, and had the all engraved n copper plates and placed n public markets and halls of justice. He was in this respect, perhaps the first systematic lawgiver of Kashmir.^{xxxvii} The Sultan himself took great pains for ascertaining the truth in all cases and disputes. Wherever a robbery took place in his kingdom, the chief of that village was charged with fixed fine, for this reason robberies and thefts become completely unknown. In his time the writing of the rates of the prices of different items was ordered, these were engraved on thin copper

plates and were left in all cities to indicate that all customs of all tyranny had been rooted out in the kingdom of Kashmir. The Sultan did not direct thieves and robbers to be executed, but he ordered that they should work every day with chains on their feet on public buildings and should be supplied with their food.^{xxxviii} In matters of justice, law and order we can conclude that Zain Ul Abdin resembles Sher Shah Suri of Sur dynasty.

CONCLUSION.

Zain Ul Abdin is one of the great individuals of history, a man who defied the prejudices of his time and attempted to create among his subjects a new concept of politics and culture, that his Kashmir should be without religious barriers where all people are members of one state irrespective of caste, colour or creed. The most illustrious contribution of Sultan was his encouragement and patronage towards the common people, which led to the tremendous development of Kashmir. His efficiency, his far-sighted reforms turned Kashmir into an industrial garden and made tremendous progress in various fields like, education, literature, arts and crafts, irrigation, public works etc. Zain ul Abdin stands high above all those who ruled Kashmir. He was a great and glorious sovereign of very high ideals and filled with a desire to achieve them. He was universally loved and respected and is still remembered as Budshah, the great king.

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