A Page from Kashmir History

How Pandits ruled over Kabul?

To Kashmiri Pandits, Nand Ram Tiku and Sahaj Ram Dar played a very important role during Afghan rule in Kashmir. Pandit Nand Ram Tiku ruled over Kabul with a strong grip over administration. He is credited to have struck coins in his own name. The coin was known as Nand-Ram-Zarb after this Pandit Dewan of Kabul. The coin was in circulation in the tribal areas of Afghanistan till 1910 A.D.

By G L Jalali

Afghanistan is in turmoil these days. This mountainous country has become a stronghold of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda fundamentalists. But there was a time when a part of it was ruled by Kashmir Pandits in the capacity of the Dewan at Kabul. Both Kashmir and Afghanistan had close political relations with each other. Mughal rule in Kashmir came to an end in 1752 when Ahmed Shah Abdali conquered Kashmir which subsequently became an integral part of the kingdom of Kabul. The Afghans ruled over Kashmir for a period of sixty-seven years. Two prominent Kashmiri Muslims Mir Muquim Kanth and Khwaja Zahir Didamari were responsible for inviting the Afghan freebooter Ahmed Shah Abdali to invade Kashmir and to bring it under the Afghan rule. Abdali sent his army under the command of Abdullah Khan Isk Aqasi to conquer Kashmir. The forces of Kashmiri rulers were defeated in a fierce battle. In this way Kashmir became a part of the Afghan empire. Afghan rule over Kashmir proved very disastrous for the valley, particularly for the Kashmiri Pandits. Kabul rulers sent their Governors to rule over Kashmir. All these Afghan governors were blood-thirsty tyrants who left no stone unturned in persecuting Kashmiri Pandits. The Afghan period constitutes the darkest period in the history of Kashmir. All these Afghan governors were, more or less, mentally deranged barbarians. For example take the case of the Afghan governor (Subedar) Haji Karim Dad Khan. He was out and out a psychopath who used to kill Kashmiri Pandits just "for the sake of pleasure". It is said that he would put Pandits into gunny sacks and hurled them into the Dal lake to meet their watery grave. He imposed a special tax, called ZARI-DOOD, on hapless Kashmiri Pandits. Because of the atrocities on Kashmiri Pandits, bulk of Valley's Hindu population migrated to plains. During the Afghan rule Shia Muslims in Kashmir suffered untold miseries. Their houses were looted by the hooligans and swindlers. Afghan rule lasted till 1819 when the Valley was conquered by Diwan Mohakam Chand, a general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. After conquering the Valley, the whole of Kashmir became a "Suba" or province of Lahore Kingdom. Some notable Kashmiri Pandits played an important role during the time of Afghan Subadars (governors). One such name is Sahaj Ram Dar. Abdullah Khan, the governor of Kashmir, was confronted with a very difficult situation. There was utter chaos and complete lawlessness in the Valley. Marauding bands of robbers and thieves had a field day all over Kashmir. The very life of an average Kashmiri was in danger. "The petty Bomba and Kholda chiefs had become a nuisance in Kamraj and kept on constantly committing depredations over there, looting, plundering and killing the people", writes J. L. Kilam in the History of Kashmiri Pandits (chapter XX). But governor Abdullah Khan wanted to stem the rot at any cost. He wanted to appoint capable persons in administration, irrespective of religious considerations. He could not trust any Kashmiri Muslim officer to improve the lot of the suffering masses. To the great astonishment of the Muslim bureaucracy, the Afghan governor appointed Pandit Sahaj Ram Dar as his "Sahib-Kar" and delegated him
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NAND-RAM"
Tiku surpassed other Muslim bureaucrats because of his being highly efficient adminis- trator. "he is credited
In modern termi- nology the Dewan was equal to the "Revenue Minister" in those days. Pandit Nand Ram
this Pandit Dewan of Kabul. It was in circulation in the tribal areas "till at least 1910 A.D." I have seen such
coins preserved in Sri Pratap Museum in Srinagar before the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the
Valley. Pandit Nand Ram Tiku ruled over Kabul with a strong grip over administration. He was said to have
suppressed lawless elements with iron hand. One cannot imagine how difficult it was to rule over the tribal
belt dolted with irresistible tribal chiefs who were always in revolt against the Kabul authorities. But Nand
Ram Tiku showed his mettle and curbed the revolts of the tribal chiefs. Nand Ram Tiku has carved a name
in the stormy history of Kashmiri Pandits as an efficient administration and far sighted ruler in an alien land.
"A number of Kashmiri Pandits settled in Kabul, chief amongst whom besides Pandit Nand Ram
Tiku was Pandit Daya Ram Kachroo" (A History of Kashmiri Pandits). Pandit Daya Kachoo "Khusdil" was
an eminent Persian scholar. He was the father of Pandit Birbal Kachroo, the noted historian. Pandit Nand
Ram Tiku had a brother living in Kashmir. His name was Pandit Hara Das. Because of his brother's position,
Har Das rose to a very high position in the state bureaucracy. He became very close the Afghan governor
of the Valley. The annual tribute was sent to the king of Kabul through Har Das It is said that "Hara Das lived a
life of pomp and power". His relations with the Afghan governor became strained because the Afghan
governor Abdullah Khan took no interest in the welfare of the people. Pandit Hara Dass apprised his all
powerful brother Pandit Nand Ram Tiku of the deteriorating law and order situation. The result was that
Nand Ram Tiku "got an order issued from the king of Kabul, summoning Abdullah Khan to Kabul". On his
arrival in Kabul, Abdullah Khan was imprisoned by the king of Kabul at the behest of Pandit Nand Ram Tiku.
He was lodged in Bal Hazra fort. When Abdullah Khan left for Kabul, he ordered his younger brother Atta
Mohammad Khan "to conduct the administration in his absence". But Abdullah Khan's another brother Vakil
Khan secured an appointment order from the king of Kabul. He proceeded to the Valley with a large force.
But his forces were defeated by the army of governor Atta Mohammad Khan. Pandit Har Dar Tiku was
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at the receiving end. "Their houses were burnt, property looted and many of them were killed" (History of
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Mohammad Shah. Somehow the unprisoned- ed governor of Kashmir Abdullah Khan took advantage of the
situation and "secured release from the prison by offering huge bribe to the jailor" Immediately after his
release, he rushed to Kashmir where he declared himself an indepen- dent ruler of Kashmir. During the rule
of Abdullah Khan Kashmir was rocked by a severe earthquake which took a heavy toll of life and caused
wide spread destruction of property. The earthquake was followed by the devastating flood and famine.
When we make an assessment of Kashmiri Pandit administrators during the Afghan period in
Kashmir, we cannot underestimate the role of Dila Ram E.M. Forster writes, "Dilla Ram possessed a more
liberal disposition than is usually found in an Indian. His deportment seemed uniformly benevolent to all
classes of people. With his companions he was affable and good humored. He was humane to his
domestics and exercised with a reasonable temperance the duties of his office" (quoted by Prof. M.L. Koul
He served as the Prime Minister of Kashmir during the rule of two Afghan governors, Haji Karim Dad Khan and Azad Khan. He was killed by Hazar Khan.