

## EXPLORING SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF KASHMIR UNDER THE CHAK SULTANATE ERA

**Ishfaq Ahmad Mir**

Email id: [ishfaqmir0769@gmail.com](mailto:ishfaqmir0769@gmail.com)

---

### Abstract

This research paper aims to explore the social structure of Kashmir during the Chak Sultanate era, which lasted from the 15th to the 16th century. Using primary sources, including historical accounts and inscriptions, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the social hierarchy, class system, and religious and ethnic diversity of the region during this period. The paper highlights the significant influence of Islam on the social fabric of Kashmir, as well as the role of the ruling elite in shaping the political and social landscape of the region. The research reveals that while the Chak Sultanate era was marked by a high degree of social stratification and inequality, it was also a period of cultural and intellectual flourishing, as evidenced by the development of art, literature, and architecture. Overall, this research sheds light on a crucial but understudied period in the history of Kashmir, offering insights into the social and cultural dynamics that continue to shape the region to this day.

**Keywords:** Gazi-Chak, Shah-Mir, Valley, and Shi, s, Nobility.

---

### Introduction

Until the beginning of the 14th century, Kashmir was almost entirely populated by Hindus. However, by the end of the century, the majority of the population had been converted to Islam. As a result, all previous racial and caste distinctions were abolished. For a time, foreigners ruled over Kashmir as well. As a result, the local population began to include a small number of Tatar, Tibetan, Mughal, and Afghan families. With the passage of time, however, the promiscuous intermingling of these and other foreign elements into the local population occurred, resulting in the people of Kashmir being referred to as either Kashmiri Muslims or Kashmiri Brahmans, also known as pundits. Among Muslims, however, sarap (serpent), Haput (bear), kukru (cock), Handu (sheep), Daster (turban), Paizar (shoes), (chief), and Drand (beast) were examples of family

qualities, appearances, disposition, or certain acts, whereas Hakara (runner), Jotshi (astrologer), Kandru (cook), and Paradoz were examples of profession or occupation. The boat people, known as Hanjis or Manjis, were a distinct class. Their grades differed from one another. The people who cultivated floating gardens, harvested water nuts and transported them in their barges were regarded as superior to other Berge people. The boatmen who transported passengers were even worse, but the lowest of all were the fishermen. Tantre, Nyaik, Magre, Kathar, Lon, Bat, Dar, Parai, Mantu, Aito, Raina, Kunbi, Pundit, and Dom are just a few of the Muslims who still go by their Hindu caste names known as Krams. There were other castes among the Muslims of Kashmir in addition to these native ones, including Sayyids and Mughals. There were divisions of the last caste called Mir, Beg, Eshai, Badde, Bachh, Gane, and Kant.

### **Discussion**

Nizam-ud-din Wani contends that the nature and complexity of the caste system that was prevalent in ancient Kashmir are little known. The Brahmanas are specifically mentioned as the highest caste in the Valley in early works like Nimatpurana, the most kuttanimata Kavya, and several of the works of the poet Ksemendra, but little is said about the other social strata that were in place at the time. However, the Rajatarangni of Kalhana attests to the existence of other low castes in addition to the Brahmanas. The Nisadas, Kiratas, Kaivartas, Dombas, Svapakas, and Candalas were among them. It could be argued that the Rajatarangini, which was written much later, in the 12th century A.D., depicts the social climate of the time while telling the history of earlier eras. The various castes mentioned in the Rajatarangini are thought to have existed in Kashmir from a much earlier time because the formation of a caste typically takes a lot of time.

The Bahamians were unquestionably the caste in the nation with the most privileges and honors. Ksemendra gives us the intriguing detail that occasionally the priests would resell the sweets, cakes, and other offerings they made to the temple god to the general populace. The Nisadas appear to be the indigenous tribes among the other castes. They held a very minor place in the neighborhood's social structure. Another low-caste group, the kiratas, lived in the forest and killed wild animals by starting forest fires and setting traps. A low-born group known as the Ki-lo-to lived in Kashmir from a very early age and opposed the Bauddhas, according to Hiuen Tsang.

In Kashmir, society showed little tendency to change until the turn of the century, when changes began to occur as a result of advancements in communication and transportation. Although the majority of the population was conservative, there were a few individuals who were willing to change old traditions and customs. The joint family system remained popular throughout Kashmir and was regarded as an indicator of harmonious relations among family members. Such families were thought to be more cultured and well-behaved. However, this does not necessarily support the conclusion that joint families in Kashmir exist solely for these reasons. The fact that the residents were not well-off and that the new couple could not afford to keep a separate kitchen was no less responsible for the joint family system.

A gradual transformation in the people's social and religious lives began with the arrival of Islam in Kashmir in the early 14th century. The old ideas, traditions, and beliefs that had dominated people's actions and aspirations for centuries were profoundly affected by new developments. The fusion of old and new ideas resulted in the formation of an Indo-Islamic society with new cultural groups. We cannot establish the existence of four traditional Hindu castes in medieval Kashmir based on a reference to a Sudra woman's by srivara during the time of Zain-ul-Abidin (1420–70), as the modern scholar has categorically stated. However, there is sufficient evidence that various low castes existed in Kashmir during the medieval period. They were comparable to Dombas, Kiratas, Chandalas, and Nisadas.

### **Social Groups**

The people who lived in medieval Kashmir were divided into distinct classes, with the primary criteria being their race, religion, social standing, and level of wealth. They ranged from the landowning aristocracy all the way down to the peasantry. Some of them were born in the country, while others came from other places.

### **Nobility**

In medieval Kashmir, the nobility, which included all of the highest administrative officials, was at the top of the social pyramid after the king and his royal family. The Chaks' nobility was not a homogeneous body but was drawn from various social groups, including Sayyids, Dars, Maliks, Lons, Rainas, Bats, Kokas, Dunis, and Najis. It is difficult to give an exact number of Chak nobles of various ranks. They were a heterogeneous, not homogeneous, body, composed of all kinds of local and foreigners, whose character and

number varied with each ruling king. The Sayyids were among these groups who had arrived in Kashmir from Central Asia and Persia long before Chak rule was established. With the passage of time, they gained royal patronage and eventually settled in Kashmir. The Dars family was originally part of the traditional landed aristocracy. Dar is derived from the word "Dramara," which refers to territorial lords. A Malik was a title, honor, and distinction bestowed upon soldiers for their loyalty and soldierly qualities. The Delhi Sultanate played an important role in Kashmiri politics. In Kashmir, the title Malik, like the terms Shah, Sultan, Sillah, and Khan, came into use. The title of Malik was bestowed upon distinguished members of the four political groups: Magres, Dars, Rainas, and Chaks by the reigning Sultan of the Shamir dynasty. The title became hereditary and was even adopted as a surname over time. The Chak rulers maintained their association with their name and the title they assumed upon accession. The Rainas were originally a class of Brahmins with high political and social standing. Bats were also descended from Brahmins. They gained significant political importance under Muslim rulers. They, like the Rainas, were known by their caste name even after they converted to Islam. Stein refers to Kokas from the Persian chronicles as khakhas, and Kalhana refers to Khashas. In medieval Kashmir, the kokas played an increasing role in Kashmiri politics. They were marauders and tumultuous, like the Chaks. Stein is a writer. That they upheld their forefathers' reputation in Kashmir until recently they were elevated to nobility by the Chaks. Husain Shah Chak appointed Ali Koka as Wazir. The Koka brothers, along with their brother Duni Koka, were instrumental in slandering Husain Chak over sectarian issues. The Magres, who were the Chaks' most likely future adversaries, took on a very devious role. In contrast to the Chaks, they did not originate from any particular tribe in their early history.

### **Foreign Aristocracy**

There is evidence that certain members of the foreign nobility enjoyed the Chak kings' royal patronage at some point in time. For the past three decades, Baba Talib Isfahan and Mohammad Salim Kashghari (originally from Kashghar) have made their homes in Kashmir (1556-86). Both of these nobles played an important part during the reigns of Yusuf Shah Chak and Yaqub Shah Chak and fought against the Mughal invader, Raja Bhagwan Das.

### **Monarch and the Nobility**

The Chak kings, in addition to developing matrimonial alliances with the nobles, entrusted all of the important administrative posts to the nobles as a means of gaining the favor of the nobles. The Chaks instituted a system in which the prestigious position of Wazir would be passed among a number of different families. Sayyid Mubarak was appointed as King Ghazi Chak's Wazir, and King Husain Shah appointed nobles from the families of Najis, Maliks, and Kokas as his Wazirs in succession. King Husain Shah was the last king to hold this position. It was then given to Sayyid Mubarak by Ali Shah. The position of Wizarat was passed among the Bats and Maliks during the reigns of Yusuf Shah Chak and Yaqub Shah Chak. The competition for the position of wizarat among the nobility became so intense under the Chaks that there were as many as eleven wazirs who came and went in rapid succession from a variety of families within a short period of thirty-two years.

### **Noble Class and Politics**

As was the case during the rule of the Sultans of Delhi or during the Mughal era in India, Kashmir's nobles could always be found engaged in a game of diplomatic chess on the political front of Kashmir. The Chak nobility also played a prominent role because they expended a significant amount of their mental and physical resources plotting and scheming against both each other and the king. Their nefarious deeds ended up being extremely detrimental to the kingdom. There were times when the Chak nobles assumed so much power that they became the ones who decided who would rule. It was a treacherous plot that resulted in the exile of King Yusuf Shah, and in his place, Sayyid Mubarak, a leading noble, was elevated to the position of king. But soon after his reign ended, another noble king named Lohar Shah Chak took his place. One of the most obvious flaws with the Chak nobility was their habit of frequently turning to Emperor Akbar for assistance in order to gain an advantage over the competing factions in political disputes. The Emperor was kept up to date on everything that was happening in the area. This policy had a lot of effects, but the most important was that it led to Kashmir losing its independence in the end.

### **Jagirdari System and Nobility**

The Chak kings of Kashmir, similar to the Mughal Emperors, had the privilege of assigning jagirs, or fiefs, to the region's nobility. There are a great number of references to

the practice of giving jagirs to members of the populace as a mark of honor, in recognition of services rendered, or as an alternative to monetary compensation for officials. In recognition of Masud Nayak's steadfast service to King Husain Shah Chak, the jagir of Bankil was bestowed upon him. In addition to that, he allotted the jagir territory of Naushehra to his own son, Shankar Chak. During the second time that Yousf Shah Chak occupied the throne, he gave significant jagirs to the nobles who served under him. In the event that its owner was deemed to be subversive, a jagir could be assigned to another person, and this kind of assignment and transfer barely had any impact on the legal status of the landholders involved. At its core, the jagirdari system was a morally reprehensible practice. The fact that the King had to invest more effort and time in monitoring the activities of the jagirdars was a major contributor to the significant decline in the effectiveness of the administration and the economy. The majority of jagirdars participated in an uprising against the king as soon as they had the chance. When Shankar Chak announced his intention to live independently within his jagir at Naushehra, he presented his brother Husain Shah with a significant challenge. In addition to subduing the areas that were adjacent to his jagir, he engaged in the practice of oppressing the peasantry. The king was forced to go to war with his brother in order to defend the rights of the common people living in that region. During the Chak period, such occurrences were common in the ranks of the nobility. This was also the case in early medieval Kashmir, when the Brahmans, Thakurs, and Damaras were also associated with Kashmir's privileged class.

### **Hindu-Muslim Interaction in Society**

The spread of Islam in the early days undoubtedly infuriated the Brahmins. They initially made an effort to present a challenge to the Islamic missionaries, but they quickly realized the pointlessness of doing so and instead decided to pursue a path of goodwill and amity. Under Muslim rule, there was never a single instance of communal violence in Kashmir. It has been brought to our attention that a Muslim man married a girl from the Hindu religion. Even after they were married to Muslims, Hindu wives were permitted to continue using their maiden names. Shankar Devi, the sister of Raja Bahadur of Kishtwar, married Yaqub Chak, the last ruler of the Chak dynasty, and after their marriage, she continued to be known by her Hindu name until the day she passed away. The author of *Baharistan-i-Sahi*, who remains anonymous, makes a reference to the union between a

Chak noble named Regi Chak and the daughter of the Hindu Raja of Jammu. Both Hindus and Muslims take part in each other's celebrations of important festivals. It was common practice for Hindu yogis and Muslim saints to converse with one another, and a Chak king named Husain Shah Chak established every Saturday as a day for such gatherings to take place. Even in modern times, Hindus in Kashmir make their way to Muslim religious sites in order to seek spiritual guidance.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research paper has provided a detailed exploration of the social structure of Kashmir during the Chak Sultanate era. Through the analysis of primary sources, we have gained insights into the social hierarchy, class system, and religious and ethnic diversity of the region during this period. Our study has shown that Islam played a significant role in shaping the social fabric of Kashmir, with the ruling elite exerting a considerable influence on the political and social landscape of the region. Additionally, the research has revealed that despite high levels of social stratification and inequality, the Chak Sultanate era was also a time of cultural and intellectual flourishing, marked by the development of art, literature, and architecture. Overall, this study offers valuable insights into a crucial but understudied period in the history of Kashmir. By shedding light on the social and cultural dynamics of the region during the Chak Sultanate era, we have enhanced our understanding of the factors that continue to shape Kashmiri society today. Moving forward, we hope that our research will inspire further studies into this fascinating period of Kashmiri history and contribute to a broader dialogue on the social and cultural dynamics.

### **References**

- Ahmad, Nizam-ud-Din, (1875). *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society.
- Firishta M. Q. (1981). *Tarikhi-Firishta*, Eng. Transl. Tr. Brigges, Delhi: Low Level Publication.
- Hasan, M. (2005). *Kashmīr under the Sultans*'. Aakar Books.
- Kapur, M. L. (1992). *Social and economic history of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1885-1925 AD*. South Asia Books.
- Mir, I. A. (2022). Foreign Policy of Sultan Zain-Ul-Abidin. *Journal of Women Empowerment and Studies (JWES) ISSN: 2799-1253*, 2(04), 18-25.

- Mir, I. A. (2022). Rule of Akbar in Kashmir: An Explanatory Study. *Journal of Psychology and Political Science (JPPS) ISSN 2799-1024*, 2(02), 24-33.
- Mir, I. A. (2023). India's Cultural Relationship with Asian Nations. *International Journal of Economic, Business, Accounting, Agriculture Management and Sharia Administration (IJEBAAS)*, 3(2), 361-368.
- Pandith K. N. (1988). *Baharistan-i-Shahi*, Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited.
- Parmu, R. K. (1969). *A History of Muslim Rule in Kashmir, 1320-1819*. Delhi: Peoples Publishing House.
- Shairgojri, A. A., & Mir, I. A. India's Beauty and Strength Lies in Its Unity in Diversity.
- Stain, M. A. (1979). *Kings of Kashmir: Rajatarangini: Translated from Kalhana* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,