

# 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 ruler 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

"all the administrative functions as were necessary to bring about" a radical change in the administration, ensuring improvement in the deteriorating law and order situation. In those days "Sahib-Kar" had the same status as the Chief-Secretary has in any Indian state these days. Pandit Sahaj Ram Dar was an extraordinary intelligent Kashmiri Pandit officer who proved his mettle as the most capable administrator. He was exalted to this highest position purely on merit. He put the state's economy and law and order situation on proper track. Severe punishment was given to robbers and criminals. Price of essential commodities was regulated so that poor people could buy eatables on reasonable rates. As regards army, Sahib-Kar Pandit Sahaj Ram Dar reorganised the army on sound lines. Its command was given to capable persons. The result of reforms in army proved very beneficial for the Afghan ruler. "Abdullah Khan with the aid and assistance of Sahib-Kar organised army and subjugated all the neighbouring principalities of Poonch Kamraj etc", writes Justice Jia Lal Kilam. Bombas, who were a constant source of trouble and posed a threat to the Afghan rule in Kashmir, were totally "defeated by the Kashmiri Fauj." Pandit Sahaj Ram Dar paid special attention to the development of agriculture and after years of low production "people witnessed bumper crop." As such the price of rice was reduced to "12 annas a Khirwar". No wonder that Pandit Sahaj Ram Dar became very popular and his fame travelled far and wide, says Justice Kilam in his book "A history of Kashmiri Pandits". Apart from Pandit Sahaj Ram Dar, there was another Kashmiri Pandit named Pandit Nand Ram Tiku who rose to an exalted position in the Muslim dominated bureaucratic structure. He was a man of "sagacity and tact". This unknown Kashmiri Pandit somehow came to the notice of Wazir Wafada Khan who was then the Chief Minister of Zaman Khan, the king of Kabul. The Wazir took Nand Ram Tiku in his service. Slowly and gradually the Pandit from Srinagar "rose to the exalted position of Dewan of Kabul". In modern terminology the Dewan was equal to the "Revenue Minister" in those days. Pandit Nand Ram Tiku surpassed other Muslim bureaucrats because of his being highly efficient administrator. "he is credited at one time with having struck coins in his own name with the inscription *SIM-AZ-NABUD-WA-ZARB-AZ-NAND-RAM*" (History of Kashmiri Pandits by Jia Lal Kilam). The coin was known as Nand-Ram-Zarb after 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 dotted with irrepressible 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 "Khusdii" 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 to 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 Das 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 imprisoned. It was the time when the Sunni-Shia rivalry in the Valley was at its climax. Hapless Shias were at the receiving end. "Their houses were burnt, property looted and many of them were killed" (History of Kashmiri Pandits). In the meanwhile political situation took a serious turn in Kabul due to the rebellion of Mohammad Shah. Somehow the unprisoned 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 independent 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 in Kashmir. Past and Present).

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.