

## Economy of Kashmir Under Sultans (Sultanate Period)

**Dr. Manzoor Ahmad**

**Abstract:** *The foundation of sultanate in Kashmir was laid by Sultan Shamas-ud-din Shahmir in 1339 A.D. The rulers (Sultans) of the dynasty ruled till 1561 AD, which is known in the history of Kashmir as a sultanate period. The period was a blessing for its people, as they suffered under the oppressive rule and political instability in the concluding epoch of Hindu rule. The founder of the dynasty abolished arbitrary taxes, fixed the state share and protected the people of the land from foreign invaders. During this period Kashmiris were fortunate enough to witness the rule of strong administrators like Shihab-ud-Din, Qutub-ud-Din and Zain-ul-Abidin, who with their wit and broader outlook elevated its status from a mere territory to a country and connected it with advanced states of the time. They played an important role in its political, economic, social, cultural and religious development, which instilled a concept of fraternity, brotherhood, communal harmony and hospitality among its people for which the land is still known in the annals of history.*

**Keywords:** *khutba (oration) , Pargana (territorial division), Tacava (advance loan), Jarib (land measuring tool) , Khatam band (inlayer) , Iran-i-Sageer (Mini Iran) , Zarb-i-Kashmir (mode or design of Kashmir).*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

India gave birth to the sultanate period as laid down by sultan shahub-ud-Din Ghori (Maiz-ud-Din Mohammad) after defeating Prithviraj Chauhan in the second battle of Terrain in 1192 AD. He was followed by the kings of Slaves, Khiljis, Tughlaks, Sayyids and Lodhis, the period which lasted till 1526 AD is known in the history of India as the period of Delhi sultanate. Similarly in Kashmir too Hindu rule was replaced by the Muslim period, when Shahmir had defeated Kotarani the last ruler of the Hindu faith at Indrakote (Safapore) in 1339AD. The man had arrived to Kashmir in 1313 AD. during the rule of Suhadeva (1301-1320). The ruler of the period granted him the village of Davar-Kunail in District Baramulla for his maintenance. It was by dint of his hardwork he raised to the position of a minister during the succeeding rulers and subsequently to the ruler of the state. The historians regarded him as the real founder of the Sultanate in Kashmir who ascended the throne under the name of Sultan Shamas-ud-Din Shahmir who caused Khutba to be read and coins struck in his name. He conducted the affairs of the state in a wise and statesmanlike manner. He ruled on liberal principles, abolished the arbitrary taxes and cruel methods of extorting those. Although a Muslim he made no distinction between his Hindu and Muslim subjects. He entered into matrimonial alliances with the Hindus like Akbar the Great of Mughals to win their confidence, because in Kashmir majority of the population belong to the Hindu faith as conversion to Islam was in infancy at that time<sup>1</sup>. The dynasty founded by Shahmir ruled for a period of 222 years during which 17 kings ruled whose rule lasted upto 1561AD. The chronology of the Muslim kings of Kashmir of the period as reported in the sources was as:

SNO	Kings	AD
1	Shamas-ud-Din (Term I)	1339
2	Jamshed	1342
3	Ala-ud-Din	1343
4	Shiab-ud-Din	1354
5	Qutub-ud-Din	1373
6	Sikandar	1389
7	Ali Shah	1413
8	Zainul Abidin	1420
9	Haider Shah	1470
10	assan Shah	1472
11	Mohammad Shah (Term I)	1484
12	Fate Shah (Term I)	1486
13	Mohammad Shah (Term II)	1493
14	Fate Shah (Term II)	1505

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15	Mohammad Shah (Term III)	1514
16	Fate Shah (Term III)	1515
17	Mohammad Shah (Term IV)	1517
18	Ibrahim Shah (Term I)	1528
19	Nazuk Shah (Term I)	1529
20	Mohammad Shah (Term V)	1530
21	Shamas-ud-Din (Term II)	1537
22	Ismail Shah (Term I)	1540
23	Nazuk Shah (Term I)	1540
24	Ibrahim Shah (Term II)	1552
25	Ismail Shah (Term II)	1555
26	Habib Shah	1557-1561 <sup>2</sup>

Of all the rulers some have made their ungraded contribution to peace, prosperity, communal harmony and shine like glowing eyes of a bride, while some ruled contrary to that. It is worthy to note that Shahmir though ruled for a brief period of three years, yet was a blessing for his subjects. The country had suffered in the past owing to internal strife and foreign invasions. Humane, gentle, just and generous minded ruler assuaged the trouble of Kashmir and changed its condition. Shihab-ud-Din (1354-73) proved a successful administrator and gave peace and tranquility to the country. Big landlords both Hindus and Muslims, who bore hard on the people and indulged in law-breaking activities, were brought to book. He gave priority to the improvement of agriculture and prosperity of the peasants, who encouraged them to grow more food. He made no distinction between his Hindu and Muslim subjects. He followed a policy of toleration with other faiths. Similarly Qutub-ud-Din (1373-89) used to attend personally all the duties of the state and transacted its business with justice and moderation. He helped the suffering people in the hour of famine and distributed free food among them irrespective of faith and status. But it was Zain-ul-Abidin, Badshah (1420-1470) who with broad and tolerant outlook had ruled with equality and justice brought peace, prosperity and promoted art and learning. His policy removed the people's thirst for good kings of the old<sup>3</sup>. Unfortunately some rulers lack these qualities which dubbed them contrary to the shining administrators. Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413) though possessed a puritanical character, abstained from liquor and did not listen to music in accordance with the Islamic teachings yet has been defamed by some scholars for his religious policy, as mass conversion took place during his period. Similarly Haider Shah (1470-1472) was a drunkard and under its influence did something illegal and irrational which disturbed peace and order in the state. Further Fateh Shah and Mohammad Shah ruled the state at multi intervals as mentioned in the chorological table revealed the weakness of the rulers<sup>4</sup>. The same in conclusion led to the decline of the dynasty, as nobles had assumed more power made them power thirst and king makers. Consequently one of the nobles, Kazi Chak took up the crown from the last ruler of the dynasty, Habib Shah in an open Darbaar and put it on his own head. Thus established the rule of his dynasty in 1561, known in the history of Kashmir as "Chak Dynsaty". The kingdom of Sultans in Kashmir comprised (1) The valley of Kashmir (2) the region of Outer Hills which extended from river Ravi in the east to the Jhelum in the west and comprised Jammu, Rajouri and Poonch (3) Bhadravh, the valley of Chenab and Kishtwar which lay between the Outer Hills and high ranges around the Valley of Kashmir (4) Ladakh and Baltistan (5) The Kishan Ganga valley and the Pakhli region which lay between the upper courses of the Jhelum and the Indus. Of this kingdom only Kashmir and later on Poonch were directly administered from Srinagar while the rest of the territory was governed by their own Rajas, who paid tribute to the sultan. The period witnessed an all round development in different walks of life as it experienced the introduction of Islam by a number of Sufi saints which overhauled the whole social setup. It is not possible to discuss all aspects of life prevalent during the period in a single paper at length the paper will highlight the economic set up alone which functioned a key to all changes as revealed by the sources. Same has been discussed under the following heads to provide an extensive knowledge in the aforesaid aspect.

## 2. AGRICULTURE

Agriculture was the predominant sector of the economy of Kashmir. Majority of the population depended on agriculture being rural dwellers and even those who were engaged in other occupations especially the urban people depended on agriculture for their food and raw materials. But due to the unfavorable condition under later Hindu rulers, agricultural production had greatly declined, as the

rulers levied upon the people many oppressive taxes and left them with nothing beyond bare subsistence. As a result, villages had become depopulated and large tracts of land turned barren. It posed a challenge to the Muslim rulers of the state, who tried their best not only to stun the rot but also had taken positive steps for the promotion of agriculture. Shah Mir reorganized the whole taxation system, abolished many arbitrary taxes, stopped cruel methods of extortion and fixed the rate of land revenue at the rate of 1/6 of the gross produce. Thus the depopulated villages were repopulated, revenue demand was reduced, many extra cesses were done away with, marshes were drained and new irrigation schemes were launched. As a result of all these measures, the cultivable area of land considerably increased and the country achieved self-sufficiency in food production. The chief crops grown on the soil in the country were:-

<b>Autumn (kharief)</b>	<b>Spring (Rabi)</b>
Rice	Wheat
Maize	Barely
Cotton	Pea
Millet	Bean
Pulses	Mustard
	Opium
	Poppy
	Flax

Saffron was grown on the Pampore karewa<sup>5</sup>. Further the Sultans, their nobles and Rishis had planted gardens, which produced different varieties of fruits such as apricot, apple, peache, plum, grapes, and almond. Watermelon, melon and vegetables were cultivated on the floating gardens of the Dal lake being introduced by Zain-ul-Abidin as remarked by Abul Fazal in Ain-i-Akbari<sup>6</sup>. The valley being fortunate and abundant in water bodies, so natural irrigation system existed here which irrigated major portion of the land. While some areas were irrigated artificially, this even had taken place during the rule of Lalitaditya and Awantivarman of the Hindu period also. Consequently canals were constructed by the Sultans to bring more land under cultivation. There is no exaggeration to mention that during Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420-1470) some canals were repaired and new ones opened at Zakura and Martand which were fed from perennial rivers, the Sindh and the Lidder. The first irrigated the Zaingir Pargana in Tehsil Handwara and the later Mattan karewa in district Anantnag. Of the smaller canals worthy to note were Lachham Kul and Mar canal which functioned as a means of communication too in the interior city of Srinagar and carried a portion of surplus water of the Dal Lake to Shadipore at the confluence of Jhelum and Sindh rivers. In addition to it there was a network of canals like Karla canal, Chakdar canal, Safapore canal, Pohru canal. Owing to these irrigational works the draining of marshes and reclamation of large areas for cultivation. Kashmir became self sufficient in food stuffs and rice was sold at cheap rates. Further he divided the country into a number of Parganas, each comprising a number of villages. The holdings of every cultivator in each village was measured with the help of Jarib and these measurements were recorded on Bhojpatra. The records thus prepared were preserved in the Central-Records office established at Sopore. In addition he instructed his revenue officials to be honest and lenient with the cultivators and provided Tacava loans (advanced loans) in case of eventuality or natural calamity<sup>7</sup>. So he was ahead to Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545) of Indian history, who is known for promotion of trade and agriculture in the Medieval Period. His extensive irrigational work is the clear proof of the improved condition of the peasantry, who were in search of more land for cultivation. But his worthwhile steps to be mentioned were settlement of land revenue and fixation of rent, which with some modifications remained in operation till the end of Sultanate rule. Consequently with these steps prosperity prevailed in the territory once more as agricultural production increased at a large scale. Moor craft compared Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin with Feroz Shah Tugulaq of Delhi Sultanate in irrigational works which provided a siegh of relief to the people in the society and peasant class too reaped the fruit of their toil, who out of affection called him Badshah (great ruler)<sup>8</sup>.

### **3. INDUSTRY**

Kashmiris' are known for their artistic manufactures since ancient times. During winter as the valley remained cut off from the rest of world, the people were forced to spend their time indoors. Majority of who engaged themselves in cottage industry to augment their earnings. Of course Srinagar was the centre of industries. But other towns such as Anantnag (Islamabad) Sopore, Bandipore, Shopian and Zaingir too did not lag behind<sup>9</sup>. The chief industries included the manufacture of shawls. Silk, woolen

cloth, paper, paper-machie articles, carpet weaving, wood carving, stone work, stone polishing, glass blowing, willow work etc. Mirza Haider Dughlat hold such industries and crafts exist nowhere except in Samaqund and Bukhara, while in Kashmir these were found in abundance<sup>10</sup>.

The shawl manufacturing industry is as old as hills of Kashmir but under the rule of later Hindu kings it practically died. Credit goes to a pious Sufi saint Mir Syed Ali Hamadani for its revival who while on second visit to Kashmir in 1378 AD encouraged some local weavers to produce the said fine textile. Consequently Sultan Qutub-ud-Din the ruler of the period patronized the craft. It was Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin, who really put it on a status of flourishing national industry. During the process from its raw-wool to its finished commodity, it passed through fifteen different stages. Thus the industry provided better opportunities of employment to a large section of people as it promoted both the internal and external trade of the country and filled it with enormous wealth<sup>11</sup>. The commodity affixed a pride to the country in the world market since then shawls were exported first as presents then as saleable commodity. From times immemorial shawl wool locally known as *kilphamb* was imported from Tibet and Ladakh, being found upon the goats and yaks of Pamier terrain. The queen of textile known in Kashmir was the silk industry. Though its routes lie in the ancient period yet has made a great progress during the period under discussion. It was Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin who had improved it by introducing better technique, attractive designs and imported seeds from outside. He encouraged the rearing of silkworms and planted mulberry trees for the growth of the same. Their number was as large as Mirza Haider Dughlat mentioned in his book *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* as one of the wonders of Kashmir<sup>12</sup>. Though the demand for its production was limited yet it engaged a reasonable portion of the population in the valley in its work<sup>13</sup>. Similarly the practice of making rag paper is said to have been introduced in Kashmir by Muslim immigrants, but it was Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin of the period, who patronized the industry, brought manufactures from Samarkand and established factories at Naushahr and Gandarbal Srinagar. The paper produced was of silky texture and glossy appearances. Gradually its demand increased to expert. Some of its polished specimens came to be known as Farmashi, Dahamashi, Kalamdani and Rangmaz<sup>14</sup>. It had given birth to new art and industry known in Kashmir as papier-mâché. Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin brought experts of the art from Samarkand to teach the art to the local populace. The process involved the pasting of sheets of paper on the mould of the article to be produced. Its outer surface is painted and beautified with floral and other designs drawn with the help of a fine painting brush. It is then varnished in such a way that the appearances of the painting remains unchanged. The manufactured articles fetch a ready market since its inception till date. Consequently it provided good opportunities of employment to the populace in the old city of Srinagar<sup>15</sup>. From sources it appeared that the wood carving industry touched new heights in the period. The wood work of the Muslim period bears an eloquent proof to the fact that it received a great stimulus under the Sultans of Kashmir. While all old Hindu buildings of Kashmir were of stone the mosques of the period were of wood. Some of the important religious places of Srinagar such as Khanqah-i-Maula, Mukhdum Sahib shrine, Nakashbund sahib shrine are models of the carpenter's craft. A specialty in Kashmir's wood work known as Khatambund has been mentioned by W.R. Lawrence in "THE VALLEY OF KASHMIR" also<sup>16</sup>, which at present is considered an important artistic skill of the people engaged in it avail better means of income at present as well. Similarly carpet weaving industry opened its eyes in the period. The industry made a rapid progress. There was a great demand of its production outside the country for which Kashmir assumed the name of Iran-i-Sageer. In addition to these there were other arts which by and large engaged a bulk of population such as stone polishing, glass making, tannery, willow work, woolen cloth, namdha, gabha-sazi, silver work, copper work and boat making. Pandit Anand Kaul in his book "JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE" mentioned that it was Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin who turned Kashmir into a smiling garden of industry, inculcating in the hearts of the people sane conception of labour and life and also implanted in their minds the germs of real progress. The contribution of the rulers during the period by and large played an important role in the prosperity of the country as a whole.

#### 4. TRADE

Trade and commerce played an important role in the economy of Kashmir. It was a good source of revenue to the state, which stimulated manufactures and gave employment to a large section of people. Moreover it poured wealth in Kashmir by its merchants, whose activities were not confined to the valley alone but extended to Bengal, the Coromandel Coast, Lhasa, Beijing, Persia and central Asia. The sources revealed that traders were engaged both in internal and external trade during the period which stabilized the economy of the masses at local level and of the state in its broader context.

#### 4.1. Internal Trade

It was carried on in imported as well as locally produced commodities which were salt, luxury goods, shawls, silk, coarse woolen goods and various other products of its handicraft. Trade in these articles was conducted by the private merchants alone, though in grain state too carried it. Besides the state was opposed to the cornering of grain and the private traders had to sell it at meager profit. So the merchants did not indulge in large scale transactions in grain. Further the control over prices of different commodities was regulated by the government monthly to check black marketing that accelerated the flow of trade as traders of the period were quite prosperous which showed their excellent trade<sup>17</sup>. According to Mirza Haider, the markets and streets of Srinagar were well paved with hewn stone. In the markets, only drapers and retail dealers were found. But other traders like grocers, druggists, beer sellers and bakers did business in their homes<sup>18</sup>. The practice continued till Mughals hold the reins of the state when the system changed and all kinds of traders began to transact their business in the market. Consequently trade at Anantnag, Sopore, Shopian, Awantipore and Baramulla got a flip. The chief means of transport in the valley was river Jhelum as in the Hindu period. Potters carried heavy loads over difficult terrain. Pack ponies were used for carrying paddy and other food grains from distant villages to the town market as wheeled carriages were unknown, roads were narrow. The rivers were spanned by bridges constructed of stone and timber which was a permanent feature introduced during the period, that expedite the flow of trade as journey became more easy<sup>19</sup>.

#### 4.2. External trade

Despite Kashmir was enclosed by huge mountains from all sides yet she maintained close trade relations with India through the south and with Tibet, central Asia, china and Persia through the north and North-West. Her merchants were scattered over the different parts of Asia and carried on an extensive trade. They laid their establishments at Patna, Banaras, Lhasa, Kathmandu, Beijing, Bengal, Punjab, Bhutan, Khurasan, Turkistan and on the Coromandal coast. Kashmir was accessible by 26 different routes with its neighbours, most important of these which connect it with central Asia were through Gilgit and Kashgar and from Skardu to Yarkand. These routes also led to china with which the country had a brisk trade. Its trade connection with Punjab was carried on through Pir Panjal passes while trade of Punjab with Ladakh, Baltistan and eastern Turkistan pass through Kashmir. Consequently goods between Kashmir and Ladakh were carried through Zojila Pass. Similarly communication between Kashmir and Transoxiana was maintained through Gilgit and with Persia through Punjab. The chief commodities imported were salt and shawl wool. Major salt come from Gujarat and Rawalpindi via Pir Panjal route despite some come from salt lakes of Ladakh as well. It was the raw material for shawl manufactures which came from Ladakh, Tibet and Yarkand. In addition to shawl wool, Tibet exported gold and musk to Kashmir and from Khotan Jade, silk, carpet, pottery, brass and copper vessels were imported. Agate, precious stones were imported from Badakshan, Bukhara and Yarkand. Kashmir imported cotton, sugar, spices, gold, silver and copper from India<sup>20</sup>. The most important articles of export from Kashmir were Kashmiri shawls, woolen goods, blankets, fresh and dried fruits, saffron, timber and paper. Further Kashmir served as a channel through which Punjab maintained its commercial relations with Baltistan, Eastern Turkistan and Tibet. She also exported many commodities received from the latter countries. Consequently in Srinagar one found Turkish, Tibetan, Indian, Nepali traders who had established their shops and godowns here. Similarly Kashmiri merchants had their shops in Kathmandu, Bengal, Nepal and Tibet. In all these countries Kashmiri articles were in great demand which showed a reciprocal trade among the countries<sup>21</sup>.

#### 4.3. Source of Revenue

The state derived its income mainly from the land and the method of assessment embodied, sharing, appraisement, measurement. It is Tarikh-i-Rashidi which had given us a fair idea of the system of revenue assessment that was prevalent during the period. Further it had mentioned that land in Kashmir was classified into four categories. 1) *Abi* (irrigational land) was cultivated by irrigation and the assessment on it was the heaviest. 2) *Lalmi* (Arid land) depended on rainfall so less taxed. 3) *Bagh* (orchid) enjoyed exemption from the tax under Sultans. 4) *Marg* (Meadow) being unfit for cultivation, meant for grazing so not taxed at all. The system showed a definite improvement over the Hindu period<sup>22</sup>. The system of collection under the period was identical to the system prevalent under the Hindu rulers. The assessment was made on the basis of annual produce of a whole village. The peasants could not remove their produce from the threshing floor until the government had taken

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away its share. The state removed its share to the city and sold the same to its citizens at fixed rates. Shahmir the founder of the period had fixed the revenue demand at  $\frac{1}{6}^{\text{th}}$  of the total produce to reestablish the country's economy which had been shattered under late Hindu rulers. Though his successors raised the same to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the produce yet in eventuality it was reduced to  $\frac{1}{4}^{\text{th}}$  and in some areas  $\frac{1}{7}^{\text{th}}$  e.g. during Zain-ul-Abidin. In addition they protected the peasants from the exploitation of government officials who used to suck their blood as happened in the previous period. Of course after the death of Hassan Shah (1484 AD) till the fall of dynasty, they suffered a great deal due to the civil wars<sup>23</sup>. Besides there were several other taxes and cesses levied on the people such as Zakat realized from Muslims, Jazia imposed on Non-Muslims by Sultan Sikandar (1389-1413) though it was abolished by Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin later on. Furthermore ferry-toll, bridge-toll (baj, Tangha), cess on arts and crafts (Rasum-i-Birfagaran) on boat men and the produce on lakes (Rasum-i-Mirbahri), tax on firewood (Wan-waziri) cattle (Gaw-Shumari) and trees (Sar-Darakhti) were exacted. Custom duties imposed on import and export known as Rahadari was collected at borders by the Nayaks. In addition to these there existed shameful custom of Begar (forced labour) as exacted from villagers and boat men. Thus one feels that on the whole the incidence of taxation on common man continued to be as heavy as was under the Hindu kings especially in the concluding period of the Sultanate<sup>24</sup>, while during the rule of strong rulers they enjoyed due reward of their hard labour.

### 4.4. Coinage

The monetary system of Kashmir as prevailed during the Hindu period remained in operation throughout the rule of Sultans as well. The system under sultanate consisted almost of copper alone. The copper coins being called "punchhus" but cowrie was used for fractional payments. It has been noted that Zain-ul-Abidin struck coins of lead and brass also silver coins were uncommon, while gold coins were rare. The currency under the period consisted of Dinar, Bahagani, Punchhu, Hath, Sasun, lakh and crore<sup>25</sup>. Their value was as:

12 Dinars	→	1 Bahagani	100 Sasun	→	1lakh
2 Bahagani	→	1 Punchhu	100 lakh	→	10000000 dinars (1 crore)
4 Punchhu	→	1 Hath			
10 Hath	→	1 Sasun			

However no coins of Kashmiri Sultans are known to exist earlier than of Sultan Sikandar. The coins of Sultans of Kashmir possess certain characteristics which distinguish those from the coins of the Delhi Sultans. 1) They are extremely inartistic and small. 2) Less attention was paid to its chronology. 3) Dates are not legible, which hinder the actual date of succession of a particular ruler. 4) They are all square and have same kind of legend on its reverse namely Zarb-i-Kashmir. Srinagar was the chief mint town during the Sultanate period and the present Sarafa Mohalla in Zain Kadal is said to have been the locality of old mint in the city<sup>26</sup>.

### 4.5. Weight and Measure

The units of weight and measurement during the Muslim period did not undergo any change to the system of Hindu period which exist as:

16 Mashes	→	1 Tola	16 Tarak	→	1 Kharwar
80 Tolas	→	1 Seer	1 kharwar	→	80 seer
$7^{1/2}$ Pols	→	1 Seer	1 Gira	→	$2^{1/4}$ inches
5 Seer	→	1 Tarak	16 Giras	→	1 Gaz

In India land was divided into plots each of which was called bigha but in Kashmir each plot was called patta and 1 Tarak of land was equal to  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an acre of the present day<sup>27</sup>.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The period really showed a remarkable progress over its previous one (Hindu Period) though in concluding epoch due to internal strife, the peasants had passed through a pitiable condition yet the fixation of state share by Shah Mir, consolidation of peace by Shihub-ud-Din and irrigational works, reclamation of fresh land handled by Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin were clear proof of the improved

condition of the peasantry who were in search of more land for cultivation. The ruler out of affection being called Budshah had surpassed Sher Shah Suri of Medieval Indian history in relation to his sympathetic treatment with the peasants. Further the period witnessed the progress of arts and crafts at a rapid speed under the due care of the rulers which opened vast opportunities of employment for the masses. Consequently it led to enormous trade both internal and external which had given Kashmir a pride in its economic stability. The glory of the period still exists in the mind of its habitants who run those arts and crafts which were incepted during the period and earn their livelihood.

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#### Author's Biography



**Dr. Manzoor Ahmad Bhat**, is an Indian author, born in the saffron town Pampore of Kashmir. The author got P.G in history from university of Kashmir in 1984, M. Phil in 1988 and PhD in 1992. He joined the dept. of education in 1993 as lecturer at inter-mediate level, got elevated to Asst. Professor in the said discipline in 2007 and promoted to the present scale as Senior Asst. Professor in 2011. The author had a number of Research papers published at national and international level to his credit.