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The Forgotten Shackles **A Study of Slavery and Slave Trade in the Erstwhile Chitral State**

Abstract

This paper is the first dedicated research on the practice of slavery and slave trade in the former princely state of Chitral. The research places Chitral at the center of a trans-regional slave trade in Central Asia during the 19th century, highlighting its role as a major supplier of slaves to neighboring markets. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, this paper elaborates how slavery was embedded in the local social structure, which was later on institutionalized by the state to generate revenue. After discussing various aspects of the practice, the paper links the gradual shrinking of slave trade in Chitral with external factors like abolition measures by British, Afghanistan and Russia, before it was effectively outlawed by the British after seizing power of the area in 1895. The paper explores some of the crucial aspects of the practice, such as the criteria of enslavement, price of slaves, domestic slavery, and the business and diplomatic utility of slaves. To better understand the context of the custom in Chitral, the research frequently switches to slavery in the surrounding areas of Kafiristan and Gilgit as well. Furthermore, the work also explores the religious dimensions of the issue, focusing on specific sectarian identities that were targeted discriminately during enslavement campaigns.

Introduction

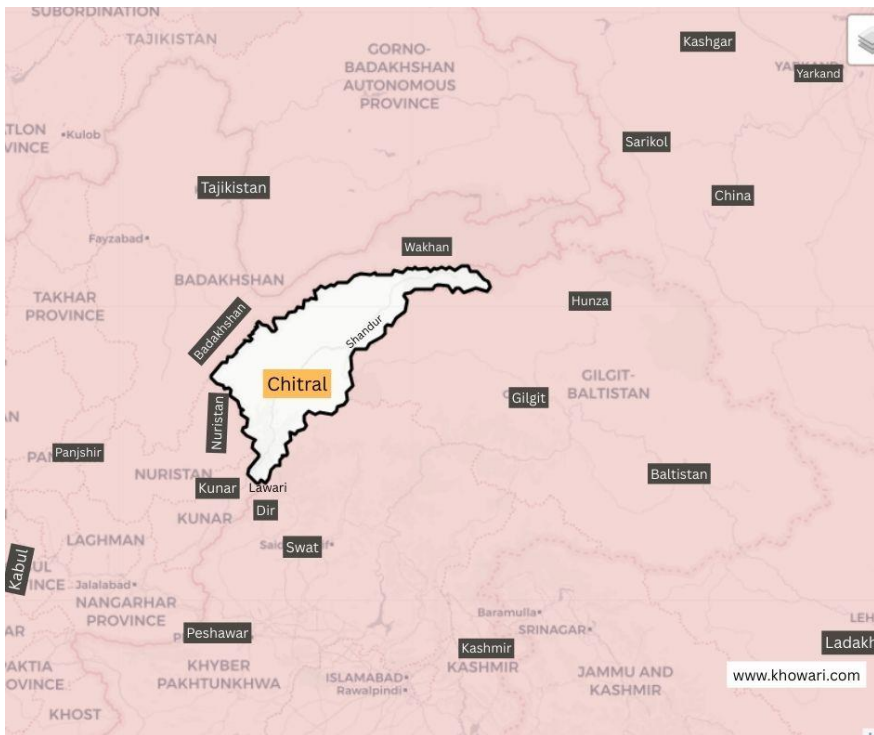
Chitral, formerly an independent princely state, lies among the Pashtun-dominated districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province in Pakistan. The 14,850 sq km area of Chitral is bounded by Dir and Swat districts in the south, Afghanistan in the west and north, and Gilgit-Baltistan in the east. The mountainous state, sometimes referred to as *Kashkar*, was once surrounded by several small princely states that later merged into the emerging national states of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, India and Tajikistan. These neighboring states included Wakhan and Badakhshan in the north, Dir and Asmar valley (now a province of Afghanistan) in the South, Kafiristan¹ a tribal region in the west, and Ghizer and Yasin (previously known as Warshigom; now part of Gilgit-Baltistan) in the east. Now comprising two districts, Upper Chitral and Lower Chitral, the area was mostly ruled by a ruler of the Katoor dynasty from 18th century onward

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¹ The author acknowledges that both the terms *Kafir* & *Kafiristan* are highly charged and are usually used with negative connotations in today's world. However, due to the absence of any endonym, both the exonyms are used in academic and research works related to the region as alternative to 'Pagan' and 'Land of Pagans' respectively.

with Khushwaqt rajas ruling its northern parts along with Yasin and Ghizer. The Khushwaqts shared ancestry with the Katoor, and although the family had some powerful rulers too but most of the time it was the Katoor Mehtar in the lower Chitral who enjoyed dominance, and would appoint, or at times dismiss the Khushwaqt ruler in the upper Chitral and Warshigom area.

Situated between the Hindukush and Hindu Raj Mountain ranges, Chitral was sparsely populated kingdom with settlements scattered across high and narrow valleys. Access to these valleys was difficult, the terrain rough, and harsh climate. The area was not frequented by foreigners as the high mountain passes leading into and out of the valley remained closed for most of the year due to heavy snowfall. Most caravans travelling between the Indian plains and Central Asia used to bypass this *terra incognita* and travelled through Afghanistan or Kashmir instead. This remote and neglected princely state began to gain significance and attention from the outside world in the 19th century when the “Great Game” ensued in the region, and both British India and Russia rushed to secure the passes in and around Chitral which either power could use to infiltrate into the other’s territory. British finally succeeded in bringing Chitral into their sphere of influence in the late 19th century along with Gilgit and Hunza states.



Chitral and Neighboring areas, source: Khowari

Chitral was a mysterious and peripheral land with little contact with the political powers and commercial centers around, and this inaccessibility and scarcity of resources affected Chitral in many ways. Two impacts are particularly relevant to be mentioned here; the lack of commercial activities and revenue

sources, and Chitral's aversion to social and political changes happening around. The fostering and institutionalization of a heavy slave trade to earn revenue was the outcome of the lack of economic prospects in the area, and the persistence of the custom of slavery and slave trade in Chitral until the end of the 19th century when it was already banned in the surrounding areas was a testimony to the above-mentioned reluctance to change.

Slavery and its context in Chitral

Needless to say, slavery was not unique to Chitral, as it existed in one form or another in most civilizations worldwide. Similarly, there have been discussions on the moral and legal aspects of the practice; on a limited scale at first and in a pretentious way as the human social and moral conscience evolved and progressed. In the 19th century, anti-slavery debates accelerated and many countries, including Britain and Russia, introduced legislation to curb the practice. However, the practice was in full swing in the Central Asian region between Russia and British India. Chitral was a major supplier to the slave markets in Afghanistan, Badakhshan and Eastern Turkistan.¹ The British explorer J. Biddulph noted: "The practice of selling their own subjects has gained the rulers of Chitral and Yassin an unenviable notoriety, even among people who have not yet learned to regard slavery with the detestation in which it is held in Europe."² In Chitral, slaves were both kept locally for domestic labor and traded to slave merchants or gifted to neighboring rulers. Slave trade was called *Roi Bezemik* in Khowar language while slaves were called *Khanazad, Roi, Daq* or *Maristan*.

Nothing can be conclusively said about when and how the practice began in Chitral due to the unavailability of research on the subject and lack of historiography on the subject. However, we may speculate that the institutionalization of the practice of selling people may have started during the era of the Rais dynasty, in the 17th century. Although undocumented, this speculation is highly probable, and is based on the presumption that it was during the reign of the Rais family that Chitral developed increasing commercial and political ties with neighbors and accepted social and religious influence from outside. It was also the Rais dynasty that saw the advent of Islam in the state. Slave trade may have emerged or facilitated by this openness to bordering areas. New sectarian identities emerged and "othering" of certain groups based on religious grounds began during this era. The Ismaili sect (also known as *Maulais* in Chitral) was largely seen as heretical, as were the indigenous shamanistic traditions, such as the Kalash, who were declared *Kafirs* (infidels). Contrary to Islamic theology which prohibits enslavement on religious grounds, the identity of the above-mentioned groups in Chitral 'legitimized' their enslavement and selling.³ However, enslavement on sectarian or religious grounds was only one shade in the broader spectrum, as we will see later.

Captain Edmund Knollys (1906), then the Assistant Political Agent of Chitral, claimed in a letter to another British officer that the institutionalization of slavery began during Mehtar Shah Nawaz's era in the earlier 19th century.⁴ He informs that a Badakhshi trader from Zebak District with many slaves at his disposal had migrated to and settled in Chitral. The trader used to sell his slaves in Badakhshani markets and purchased horses and cloth, among other items which

were resold to the Chitralis. Knollys claims that this highly profitable trade gave Mehtar Shah Nawaz a business idea that he started with state patronage, selling his own subjects in Badakhshani slave markets. I could not ascertain through other sources, the extent to which this claim is true.

The topic of slavery in Chitral has never received exclusive attention from researchers. The subject has been only occasionally mentioned in books and documents related to Chitral without primary focus or in-depth discussion. This study is the first dedicated research work to explore some crucial aspects of this topic. In addition, references to Kafiristan and Gilgit have also been made in this paper. The former, although a separate tribal region, had some areas under the suzerainty of Chitral, and slavery in the latter region was mostly carried out by the Khushwaqt Rajas in the 19th century who were the rulers of the upper Chitral and Warshigom (Yasin and Ghizer). In addition, both areas shared major social, cultural and historical ties with Chitral.

Slave trade, an official business

Slave trade was a state-sponsored business in Chitral overseen by the Mehtar himself. It was the sheer prerogative of the Mehtar in Chitral to declare someone a slave and traffic him/her outside of the state or offer to a local master.⁵ In neighboring states, the activity was also carried out by private merchants but that was not the case in Chitral.⁶ Slave business remained a chief source of revenue for the Chitrali rulers for a long period of time. British colonel and author, J. Biddulph (1880), declares slave trade as the third largest source of income for the Chitrali kingdom.⁷ The trade was carried out officially with the orders of Mehtar and supervised by his finance official locally known as *Duwanbegi*. Although there were instances when the governors who were mostly the sons of the Mehtar also captured and sold people, but the practice was not allowed to other low-tier state officials. The only other state in the region which depended heavily on slavery as key income source was that of Hunza who used to plunder caravans and enslave travelers traveling from Kashmir to Chinese Turkistan via the adjacent passes.⁸

One of the earliest accounts which noted down the practice was compiled by Raja Khan (1845) after his travels in the country as a surveyor working for the British.⁹ He estimated that some 200 to 300 slaves were annually traded to Turkestan from Chitral. However, Turkestan was not the only destination for the Chitrali slaves; they were also carried to other slave markets in the region. The markets to which slaves from Chitral were transported were Khiva, Yarkand, Khoqand, Bukhara, Kunduz, Faizabad, Jalalabad and Kabul.¹⁰ After a careful analysis of all the sources, we can safely assume the number to be around 500 at the pinnacle of slave trade during the 19th century. This figure is significant for a region like Chitral which had a scant population.

Being a source of revenue for the state, *Duwanbegis* were always in search of poor subjects and criminals to sell, and there used to be hardly any family among the commoners without any member caught and sold away. In the 19th century, Mehtar Shah Nawaz, Raja Gohar Aman and Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk were notorious for selling their subjects. One of the reasons for Shah Nawaz's ouster from power in the first quarter of 19th century is said to be his indulgence in excessive slave trade, which caused him to lose popularity among the masses.¹¹

Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk (r. 1857AD-1892AD), probably the most powerful Katoor chief was also known for the infamous act of selling out widows and orphans along with others. A Kalash informer told the authors of *Gates of Peristan* that his ancestor married several widow women in his tribe to save them being enslaved.¹² Raja Gohar Aman of Yasin earned the nickname *Adam Farosh* for the extensive enslavement he carried out in his area, particularly in Gilgit.¹³

Who was made a slave?

In ancient Chitral, society consisted of different strata and classes based on race, clan, power and political influence. Among them, the elite were called *Adamzada*, the middle class *Yuft* and the lower class *Faqir Miskin*. The Mehtar had a self-proclaimed authority to take away the lands and property from anyone except *Adamzada* and declare them as slaves.¹⁴ The lowest class i.e., *Faqir Miskin* consisted of either *Cheermozh* (peasants) or the *Khanazads* (domestic slaves). A peasant used to work for the masters in return for a piece of land to sustain the family and had the choice to earn liberty from the labor by returning the land. However, the *Khanazads* were considered the ultimate property of masters. Mehtar could snatch someone's property and declare him a *Khanazad*. They were people who usually lacked a strong family or clan at their back. They could be slaves purchased from outside Chitral, prisoners of war, fugitives or illegitimate children. *Khanazads* did not receive any compensation for their labor and survived on a piece of land offered by the master. Unlike the peasants, *Khanazads* exercised far less liberty than the *Cheermuzh*. These were owned by wealthy *Adamzadas* or in rare cases, *Yuft*. The owner could buy and sell them if he wanted.¹⁵ Similarly, slave women were sent by *Adamzadas* as part of the dowry with the brides. Such slave women were known as *Rumtu Dero* (literally, 'attached to the tail'). Slave status was inherent to children born to a *Khanazad* family.¹⁶

Slavery was also administered as punishment to criminals and dissenters. The state of Chitral lacked resources to manage prisons for convicts. Thus, trading them away to slave traders was seen a viable solution not only to get rid of them but also to earn money. A very petty crime or disobedience to the authorities could welcome the wrath of Mehtar. For example, Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk wrote to a British visiting party that "he had been obliged to sell several of his subjects into slavery" just for refusing to carry up the baggage of the visitors.¹⁷ Sometimes a criminal was persecuted and the associated family members were traded off. If a person in the state caused the Mehtar's displeasure over any issue, the Mehtar would hand him over to the *Deewan Begi* who would sell him as a slave.¹⁸ We have the example of the enslavement of the supporters of the great Khushwaqt king, Shah Khair Ullah when he was killed by his rival Katoor Mehtar Muhtaram Shah II. Khair Ullah was the only Khushwaqt ruler who not only challenged the dominancy of the Katoors but also invaded their country and ruled over a united Chitral during the second half the 18th century. When the king was killed in 1790, his supporters and family members were sold into slavery.¹⁹

However, it was not only criminals, dissents or prisoners of war who were enslaved. The Mehtar and *Deewan Begi* could enslave people from the general public without showing any lawful justification, or mostly to raise funds. Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk was notoriously selling widows and orphans as slaves to raise

revenue until the slave market in neighboring states shrank with the ban on slavery.²⁰ Children as young as seven years old were sold by state officials.²¹

The pagan tribes, more famously known as *Kafirs* (lit. infidels) inhabited the border area between Chitral and Afghanistan and were the chief targets of Chitrali state officials. They were sold in Kabul, Badakhshan and Turkestan. Kafiristan, the region of the *Kafirs*, lied between Chitral and Afghanistan was an independent tribal land. Domestic slavery and slave trade were also major features of the *Kafir* society. The *Kafirs* also suffered immensely at the hands of the chiefs and merchants of neighboring Afghanistan who fetched them to sell or make domestic slaves.²²

Even among the *Kafirs*, slavery was a significant feature of their society. They used to consider the Kalash tribe servile and of degraded race. These Kalashes were the target of enslavement both in the hands of the Chitrali Muslims and more dominant fellow *Kafir* tribes.²³ Alongside the Kalash, there was another class in Kafiristan which was inherently considered slaves. This was the *Bari* (sometimes called *Bahri*) tribe in Kafiristan. The tribe consisted of house slaves and artisans such as blacksmith, carpenter, weavers and musicians. *Bari* was the lowest social class and was religiously discriminated with a restriction on them to enter into the temples as they were considered impure.²⁴ The *Baris* were sold by their masters to purchasers both inside and outside Kafiristan.

Although the essential characteristic of the people who were exposed to the enslavement was their social status, nevertheless, their religious identity also made them vulnerable to servitude. Many sources indicate that marginalized religious communities in Chitral were the chief targets during enslavement campaigns. The same discrimination can also be seen in the surrounding areas, most importantly in Afghanistan, Badakhshan and Pamir region, where the minority Ismailis and Shia Hazaras faced heavy enslavement at the hands of the majority Sunni population. Chitral is home to the Shia Ismailis and Sunnis along with non-Muslim Kalash tribe. There is also the Shia Twelver sect in Gilgit with whom the Khushwaqt rulers were constantly engaged in wars in the 19th century. The discriminatory enslavement of Ismailis, *Kafirs* and Shias was due to their religious identity which differed from that of the ruling family in Chitral which belonged to the Sunni sect of Islam.²⁵

The Sunni Khushwaqt rulers; Sulaiman Shah (d. 1829) and Gohar Aman (d. 1860) were blatantly engaged in selling their Shia subjects in Gilgit as they considered the local Shia population infidel.²⁶ We know of a decree issued by the local clergy of the majority sect which permitted the legendary Khushwaqt Raja Gohar Aman to enslave his Ismaili subjects.²⁷ The enslavement of the Shias from Bagrot in Gilgit at the hands of Gohar Aman had twofold reasons: their sectarian identity and their martial-race status which this invading Khushwaqt raja of Yasin with Chitrali roots greatly feared². One of the motives behind attack on Chitral and the enslavement of thousands of people by Sultan shah of Badakhshan was his

² "...the population of Bagrot was Shiite. The troops enrolled in this valley which could be raised by the rulers of Gilgit formed the backbone of the army. Therefore, Gohar Aman decimated the population in the 19th century when many Bagrotis were killed and others sold into slavery." Jettmar, 2002

wish to exterminate Ismailis from Chitral which will be discussed later. Shias were considered infidel in Badakhshan and thus their enslavement by local chiefs and slave merchants was not objected to. The same was true in the case of *Kafirs* whose subjection in the hands of Afghans owed to their religious identity.²⁸



Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk of Chitral (1821-1892), Source: Khowari

Faiz Bakhsh (1883) reproduced in his report, a request of an old woman submitted to Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk which sheds light on the scale at which the activity was carried out, the emotional disaster the relatives of the slave had to endure, and the insensitivity of the Mehtar to all these. "I am a poor woman. Last year your officers took my two sons and two daughters and sold them in Bukhara. This year one of your officers took my last son with him. I pray to God for his recovery. I will pray for your happiness." The mother's plea went unheard.²⁹

Robertson (1896) wrote, "There was a man who robbed me of certain articles in 1889, but whom I dared not report to the Mehtar, for fear of the terrible punishment he would receive. Meeting this individual in January 1895, we talked about his former rascalities. He declared miserably that now he would gladly be killed, for he was the only one of his family left; all the others had been sold out of the country by Nizam-ul-Mulk. It was quite true, and the village where the man lived was almost empty of inhabitants."³⁰

Chitrali slaves were employed by their masters in domestic labor, but one of the key reasons for their demand was to make them serve the illicit and exploitative desire of their masters. A British visitor to Chitral noted in 1885, "These Aryan slaves are bought for the gratification of the foulest desires of

bestial monsters, whereas the African slaves are employed entirely in honest labor”.³¹

Price of slaves

The price of a slave usually ranged from 100 rupees to 300 rupees depending on the slave's age, sex and beauty.³² Girls used to fetch Rs. 200 to Rs. 300 while boys were priced from Rs. 100 to Rs. 200. Slaves from Chitral were the most sought-after in the region due to their beauty, loyalty and obedience to their masters.³³ Meer Moonshee (1868) wrote, “The price of slaves throughout Turkistan generally varies from 500 to 100 Muhammad Shahi Rupees (a Muhammad Shahi Rupee is equal to 1 rupee and 3 Annas of English money at Peshawar).”³⁴ Badakhshi merchants used to buy a Chitrali woman for 12 Tillas, and would sell her four times that amount in the slave market in Yarkand.³⁵

It was not always money that was gained in exchange for slaves. The slaves were also bartered for items of daily use. Slaves were sold for necessities of life, including horses, weapons, carpets, utensils, and sometimes even for a donkey or a mule. The lowest price probably was of an aged man or child who could be bartered for a sporting dog.³⁶

A testimony of the price is a document of a land controversy available with Hidayat ur Rehman, a local historian in Chitral, which records a story of such a bargain. It so happened that during the rule of Aman-ul-Mulk, a Chitrali noble man, Inayat Khan Lal was returning from Kabul via the Durah pass in Lotkuh valley when he came across a woman who had been just sold by the Mehtar and was being carried away by a merchant. She pleaded to the Inayat to free her by paying the merchant the price, and in return, offered to him her land in the hamlet of Chumarkhan in Lower Chitral. The man paid 240 Rupees to the Afghan merchant and liberated the woman. The land is still in the possession of the family of the man.³⁷

Slaves from wars

From the earliest recorded history to the end of 19th century, Chitral was an epicenter of armed conflict. The wars and skirmishes were the results of various local players striving for power, and the expansionist ambitions of the bordering and regional powers including Chitral. In addition, there were the pagan tribes inhabiting the south-western borders of lower Chitral who were constantly disturbing peace and stability with their regular raids on the caravans travelling to Chitral via the Lawari pass. In all these events, the defeated party had to pay the price for their adventurism in the form of people who were captured and then kept or sold as slaves. The chronology of Chitral alludes to invasions from the neighboring Badakhshanis, Wakhis, Chinese and Turks. The accounts of such wars mention large number of people from the defeated side being enslaved and taken away by the winning force.

One of the important accounts comes from the *Tarikh-i-Badakhshan* written by Mirza Muhammad Sang (sometimes attributed to Muhammad Riza). The book tells that Sultan Shah, the then ruler of Badakhshan attacked and plundered Chitral in 1751-1752 and took away some 15,000 slaves with him. The war was waged by Sultan Shah on the pretext to destroy the Ismailis residing there.³⁸ The possibility

of an exaggeration in the number cannot be ruled out but there is little doubt in the event taking place and leading to the enslavement of a large number of Chitrali as also confirmed by *Nai Tarikh-i-Chitral*.³⁹

We have an account another war fought wholly in the pretext of catching slaves. Sometime during the second half of the 18th century, Jahan Khan, the ruler of Wakhan, attacked Chitral to catch slaves and provide them to the ruler of Badakhshan to whom he was a tributary. Jahan Khan crossed Shah Junali pass in the north and took away many Chitrali with him as slaves from the Torkhow area. In retaliation, Muhtaram Shah Katoor II, the ruler of Chitral, attacked Wakhan, burnt villages to ashes and enslaved hundreds of people.⁴⁰

Chitral and Badakhshan fought another famous war in the year 1868 when Jahandar Shah, the ruler of Badakhshan attacked Chitral with a mighty force of 12,000 soldiers. The Chitralis fought back gallantly in what later on came to be known as the war of *Darband* (a place in Yarkhun Upper Chitral). Among the war booties which Chitralis captured from the fleeing Badakhshani forces were eight hundred horses, two canons and 60 men who were enslaved.⁴¹ Another conflict sparked shortly after the Darband war when a famous *Kafir* tribal chief was murdered in Ayun valley by another *Kafir* who was a close associate of Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk. The son of the slain chief rebelled against the Mehtar who was the suzerain of Kafiristan. Aman-ul-Mulk sent his son Nizam-ul-Mulk to subdue the rebel. The mission laid siege to the famous Bargamatal fort deep inside the Bashgal valley and cut off the water supply to the inhabitants. The rebels at last surrendered to Nizam-ul-Mulk who ordered the plundering of their fort and extermination of several of their effigies which the *Kafirs* used to worship. Chitralis enslaved 150 men and women and returned. After the Bargamatal campaign, Chitralis were face to face with the chief of Asmar, an Afghan kingdom in the south-west of Chitral and the number of people the victorious Chitralis enslaved was 170.⁴²

In the Khushwaqt territory of Upper Chitral and Yasin, the local rajas made themselves a nightmare for the population of neighboring Gilgit with their frequent raids on the area in the first half of the 19th century. Whenever they had the opportunity to control it, they acted as extractive colonizers by selling as many people as possible to generate revenue and subdue the local population. The heavy slave trade depleted the population of Gilgit which fell from 6,000 houses in the first decade of the century when Sulaiman Shah Khushwaqt invaded Gilgit to 2000 by 1841.⁴³ It was the year when the most ferocious ruler, Gohar Aman ascended to the throne and the enslavement grew exponentially.⁴⁴ Through his leadership, he was able to keep the forces of Maharaja Kashmir at bay who had an eye on Gilgit, but his time was a reign of terror for the local population of Gilgit. He would sell off whole population in a village and no family was safe from losing any of its members.⁴⁵ He even surpassed the sectarian limits and once sold a poor Sunni Mulla saying that if Quran, which is the word of God, was sold, what is the problem in selling a Mulla who was the expounder of the word of God.⁴⁶ It was not surprising that Gohar got the nickname of *Adam Farosh* (the human-seller) for his notoriety, and the weary population welcomed Dogra forces of Kashmir.⁴⁷

There is a story of *Sad-barda* or 100 slaves narrated by Munshi Abdul Rahim who visited Wakhan in 1879. According to the story, an *Aishan* (title of religious leaders in Badakhshan) was a great friend of Gohar Aman of Yassin. Once, Gohar Aman offered him 100 slaves on the condition that he will alone be responsible to drive away the large band of slaves to his area. *Aishan* accepted the offer and fitted wooden yokes around the necks of the slaves. On the way some slaves refused to walk any further; he did not hesitate to behead one of them, thus, making the others comply his orders. He successfully marched them to the frontiers of Wakhan where his men came to his help, and he sold the slaves in Yarkand in return for a good fortune.⁴⁸

It was only after his death in 1860 that the forces of Maharaja of Kashmir were able to capture Gilgit. They sent a punitive army to Yasin, the stronghold of the Khushwaqt rulers in 1863, where the Dogra army massacred some 2000 people in the most brutal way. The famous slain British explorer George Hayward visited the place after 7 years and counted 147 skulls of women and children.⁴⁹ 3,000 people, mostly women, were enslaved and taken to Gilgit; 1000 more beautiful women among them were selected and sent to Jammu in Kashmir.⁵⁰

The Dogras did not, however, retain Yasin valley and Mir Wali, the son of Gohar Aman ruled the valley. He was dismissed from his position by Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk after he was alleged of murdering George Hayward. Mir Wali was in exile in Balkh when he came to know that many of his subjects were being sold by Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk. He learned of a party carrying his men travelling nearby. He took permission from the Governor of Badakhshan and attacked the escort in Zebak, freeing his subjects from the merchants.⁵¹

In another interesting event, it was the slaves who had the upper hand in a war. It occurred during the turmoil on the issue of enthronement following the death of powerful Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk in 1892 when his exiled brother Sher Afzal attacked Chitral from Afghanistan and killed Afzal-ul-Mulk, the newly-enthroned son of the late Aman. Among the men who accompanied him to Chitral in the campaign was a large number of Chitrali slaves and fugitives who had been previously sold away in, or fled to Afghanistan. The slaves looted what they could before fleeing back to Afghanistan when Nizam-ul-Mulk, another son of the late Aman retaliated, ending Sher Afzal's two-month long occupation over Chitral.⁵²

Slave Diplomacy

It is also noteworthy that slaves were not always traded by the Mehtar to earn revenue but they were also used to strengthen diplomatic ties with neighboring countries. Local rulers used to exchange slaves as gifts or tributes. Part of the items which Chitral used to pay as tribute to the neighboring Badakhshan in the 19th century was slave men and women.⁵³

In November 1870, a trans-frontier exploration party sent by the British witnessed Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk of Chitral and chief of Badakhshan meeting in Zebak to form an alliance fearing a possible attack from Kabul. Among the gifts were 21 Chitrali slave men and women presented by the Mehtar to the chief.⁵⁴ Similarly, the *Kafirs* were also obliged to send children of both sexes to Chitrali Mehtar among other things as a tribute.⁵⁵ An Indian agent working for the British

visited Wakhan in 1879-80 during the reign of Mir Ali Murdan and noted that the ruler had stopped selling his subjects as slaves and the demand of slaves from Badakhshan as tribute was fulfilled by the people imported from Chitral or Hunza.⁵⁶ Ali Murdan Shah, popular among his Wakhi community, abandoned his kingdom and migrated to Yasin valley in 1893. The reason he gave was the growing demand of slaves from the Afghan authorities but it was disgusting for him to capture his own people and hand them over to the colonizers.⁵⁷

Mehtars of Chitral used to present slaves, mostly women, to the rulers of the neighboring states as gifts. Chitrali women were famous for their beauty, so the harems of the rulers and nobles of Kashmir, Kabul and Badakhshan included Chitrali women who were sent here by the ruler as a sign of friendship or to reduce mutual hostilities.⁵⁸ Chitrali slaves were highly praised for their fidelity to their masters.⁵⁹ The slaves sent to the neighboring rulers included not only women but also handsome boys.⁶⁰ The Mehtars of Chitral themselves used to keep an expanded Harem consisting of dozens of concubines who were locally known as *Qumai*.⁶¹ The children from these concubines were seamed of lower status and not eligible to ascend to the throne. Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk had 40 children, and of the 20 boys, only 4 of them were born to his wives. The rest of them were from the concubines.⁶² Most of the *Qumai* in the harem were free women but some of them were slaves too; usually received as presents from other rulers or captured as war booty. For instance, during the Wakhan campaign mentioned earlier, Mehtar Muhtaram Shah kept two of the Wakhi slave women as his concubines who gave birth to his children.⁶³

We also come to know about a similar case where a the Khushwaqt Mehtar, Sulaiman Shah (ruling upper Chitral at that time) captured a woman named Fatima, from a Syed family during his military campaign against Shah Katoor II in 1825 in Torkhow. The lady was later on gifted to Syed Ahmad Barelvi, the famous Indian Mujahid who fought against the British during the 19th century.⁶⁴

Some other Chitrali slaves rose to prominence in neighboring states. Two certain Chitrali slaves in the court of Amir of Afghanistan, Faramurz Khan and Mohammad Safar Khan, are especially worth noting. Amir Abdul Rehman, the ruler of Afghanistan had appointed Faramurz Khan as Commander-In-Chief of Herat, a key province of his kingdom while Safar Khan was the most trusted official in his court; both of them received affectionate citation in his autobiography. The Afghan Amir had even married the daughter of Faramurz Khan who was his third wife.⁶⁵ There was another *Kafir* slave, with the same name Faramurz, in the service of Amir Sher Ali of Afghanistan (d. 1879). He was murdered in a feud and his family was divided among the sepoys of the Amir, "because the general was, after all, a slave".⁶⁶ Tarwaz Khan, a converted-*Kafir* and former slave was a general in Turkestan Army in 1878.⁶⁷ A letter dated, 29th April 1888, on behalf of Amir Abdul Rehman of Afghanistan, and the subsequent correspondences with Mehtar Aman shows that there were other similar slave-boys in his court from Chitral. Sardar Abdullah Jan (1888), Governor of Badakhshan, wrote to Aman to permit the family members of six slave-boys, 41 in total, to leave Chitral and join the boys in Afghanistan.⁶⁸ The personal request from, and insistence of the Amir for the sending their family members shows the rank and prestige, the slaves may have held in the Afghan court.

Great Game and the end of slave trade in Chitral

During the Great Game, British India was increasingly uncomfortable with the Russian expansion in Central Asia. The British felt the need to secure the mountain passes in Chitral and around, and to bring the local rulers in their sphere of influence against the Russians. Mehtar Aman-ul-Mulk was initially skeptic of the growing British activities in the region but later on developed good relations with them. British officials visiting the area observed the cruelty and had a dislike for it.⁶⁹ They also saw the abolishment of it as a potential way to enhance their popularity among the general masses who were naturally obsessed with the tyranny.

At the end of the 19th century, with the increasing influence of the British over Afghanistan and the Russians over Central Asia, slave markets in these areas began to be banned, and as a result the slave trade in Chitral also declined.⁷⁰ But still the closing of the markets did not put an absolute end to slave trade in Chitral as evident by the fact that the practice continued to be carried on by Nizam-ul-Mulk even after 1890s.⁷¹ British Agent at Gilgit, Col. A. Durand (1899) writes during his visit to Chitral in 1888, “Nizam mentioned casually that he had sold forty of his people into slavery this year, and explained that he had selected them from houses in which there were several men, so that it would make no difference in cultivating the land, an arrangement which he seemed to think showed a good deal of consideration”.⁷²

It was not only the British agents visiting Chitral who noticed the tyrannies of the state-sponsored slave trade and were wishing to see its abolishment, but the anti-slavery organizations in England had also been informed about it from official and private sources in India. The famous explorer and orientalist, Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner brought with himself a Kafiristani slave, Jamshed, to England in 1872. He was nephew of the above-mentioned slain Faramurz and belonged to the Katar valley in Bashgul. He was in service of the Yakub Ali, the son of Afghan chief Amir Ali. When his master unsuccessfully revolted against his father in 1871, Jamshed fled to Rawalpindi where he met Prof. Leitner. He was most probably the first person from Kafiristan and Chitral to visit Europe. Jamshed was affectionately received in London by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society who sent their well wishes in a letter addressed to his fellow tribesmen when he returned. They also asked the *Kafir* elders to submit their grievances against slave hunters to British officials in Peshawar.⁷³ The society regularly took the issue of slavery in this region with British authorities from then onward.

After the death of Aman-ul-Mulk in 1892, a bloody struggle ensued in the royal family over the throne of Chitral. The British, with whom the late king had made an alliance in 1885, certainly did not want to see a political chaos and unrest in this important state which they saw as buffer zone between them and Russia. A British contingent dispatched from Gilgit was besieged in the Chitral fort by Sher Afzal, the fugitive brother of Aman. He had recently invaded the country after killing Nizam-ul-Mulk, the son of Aman-ul-Mulk. The British force remained in the Chitral fort for nearly a month until much more powerful contingents were dispatched from Gilgit and Peshawar who relieved them. Consequently, the British formally established their writ on this country in 1895, and enthroned Shuja-ul-

Mulk, the youngest son of Aman, who was a minor at that time.⁷⁴ Shuja-ul-Mulk's status was that of a puppet ruler and real powers were transferred to the British political agent posted in Chitral. At this important junction of Chitral's history, the British had the power to formally ban slave trade in Chitral which they immediately did.⁷⁵ Sir George Robertson publicly announced the abolishment of slave trade in front of Chitral fort on occasion of the installation ceremony of Shuja, declaring, "...any such selling of slaves is therefore, from this time onward, absolutely illegal".⁷⁶ Later, Robertson was of the view that the children of the existing domestic slaves should also be considered free.⁷⁷ Knolly (1906) reports that the statement by the victorious British officer caused a misunderstood buzz in the area, and many domestic slaves left their masters, but this agitation was soon discouraged.⁷⁸

The question of the domestic slaves was largely left unattended due to various reasons. We can infer that the most important reason must have of be the scale and severity of domestic slavery in Chitral. The local elite, unlike in other areas, depended more on peasants (*Cheermuzh*) for labor and service than on the slaves. Thus, the number of *Khanazadas* in Chitral was not too high. Secondly, the attitude of the local people towards them was not too harsh and inhuman and most of them were willingly living with their masters to sustain themselves. Also, the state had not enough resources at its disposal to separately settle domestic slaves, freeing from their masters. It was probably due to these reasons that the domestic slaves in Chitral did not ever feel the need for any intervention in their condition neither we have any clue of them agitating against their masters, unlike the peasants who launched movements from 1950s to 1970s. These movements compelled the state, and later on, the Pakistani government to introduce legislations concerning the feudal lords and peasants.⁷⁹ But we see no such movement initiated by the *Khanazads*. The issue was, however, still pursued by The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The society had showed its satisfaction in a letter to the Secretary of State of India when slave trade was banned in 1895 but at the same time showed their concerns regarding the domestic slavery, and urged the authorities to "keep a close watch" on it.⁸⁰ The archival record of the British Parliament shows the issue of domestic slaves or *Khanazads* was still discussed as late as 1930 in the house when on the inquiry of a member about the progress in ending *Khanazad* slavery system in Chitral, the Secretary of State for India, Mr. Wedgwood Benn, answered, "My latest information, dated January, 1928, was to the effect that the Mehtar of Chitral was making every effort to liberate domestic slaves in the State, and a certain number had already been released and settled on land of their own. The process, it was reported, must be gradual, as the State has no lands at its own disposition, and these had to be obtained from the feudal chiefs in whose villages the *Khanazads* reside".⁸¹

In the same way, Slavery Convention was created by League of Nations in 1926. British tried to implement the rules and articles of the convention in the Indian states, including Chitral. The Mehtar of Chitral, H. H. Shuja-ul-Mulk, accepted the articles in 1938 after some initial reservations on some of its clauses.⁸² However, no need of any particular legislation was felt, and the Islamic and local customary laws were seen enough to curb such practice.⁸³ This shows the evolution of the customs and religious understanding of the society which had

transitioned from normalizing slavery to prohibiting it. Unlike slave trade, domestic slavery did not cease abruptly, rather the journey was tactical and gradual. Yet, the process was effective, and one can clearly see that domestic slavery diminished in the first half of the 20th century and disappeared in the second half.

Conclusion

While the history of enslavement in Chitral remains somewhat obscure, it was systematically conducted by the state throughout the 19th century. The state treated slaves as commodities, exporting them on a large scale. Chitrali slaves were highly sought after by merchants and were transported to markets across Central Asia, generating significant revenue for the state and even serving diplomatic purposes. Although anti-slavery laws in neighboring regions gradually reduced the trade, it was the British authorities who ultimately criminalized and abolished the practice by the late 19th century. Domestic slavery, however, persisted on a much smaller scale before finally disappearing in the latter half of the 20th century.

The centuries-long practice of the slave trade inflicted profound suffering on the local population. However, this crucial aspect of local history has received little or no attention from historians and anthropologists, despite the considerable body of work produced on the region. The local population itself also tends to avoid this discussion, as for some it is a source of regret, while for others it is a matter of shame. This paper has briefly highlighted the contours of slavery and the slave trade in Chitral; however, future in-depth research may reveal more about the historical, social, economic, political, and, most importantly, anthropological dimensions of the subject.

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