



Perspectives of Kashmir economy under dogra maharajas from A.D 1846-1925

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Abstract

Just as the Indian economy which is mainly agrarian based, the economy of the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir was/is primarily agricultural. The bulk of the people in the state lived on agriculture. Agriculture therefore, constituted the backbone of the Kashmir's economy and prosperity of the state depends up on the well-being of its peasant. The socio-economic life in Kashmir has always been very deeply rooted in agrarian sector, the peasant's main domain. The present study entitled "Economic Condition Of Kashmir Under Dogra Maharajas A.D 1846-1925", is a humble yet sincere attempt by the researcher to critically examine the agricultural produce and livestock of peasant economy and to assess the validity of the statement of 'the dawn of modernism'. The Third study is devoted for assessment of the peasant economy in the light of rural produce and livestock. It elaborates on a wide variety of crops (both Kharif and Rabi) cultivated by Kashmiri peasant. Furthermore makes it clear how the nature of agrarian produce, the productivity of land and yield per acre was significantly controlled and determined by the regimes, and also discusses the role of animal husbandry, the backbone of rural economy. The study is based on sources both conventional and non-conventional. A good use of primary sources like archival material, contemporary works, biographies, travel accounts, poetic literature have been made use of for putting the history of this period into proper perspective and to formulate the conceptual framework for this study.

Keywords: livestock, Rabi, kharif, production, acre, cultivation, Kashmir

Introduction

The nature and types of land, geo-climatic conditions, irrigation facilities all determined the nature of Kashmiri agriculture and thereby had a significant bearing on peasant economy. These regimes not only had their share in determining the standard of peasant economy but their role intruded into what the peasant produced through agriculture. In order to evaluate the significance of agriculture in the economy of Kashmiri peasant, it is rewarding to discuss the rural produce in the form of agricultural production and livestock. In this chapter an effort has been made to study the agricultural produce and livestock as the dominant sectors of peasant economy.

Agrarian Produce

Agrarian produce may include all that the peasant produced directly or indirectly from agriculture. But the present account is confined to the agricultural production in the form of different crops including both cash crops and food grain. There were two types of crops—Kharif or autumn crops which included rice, maize, cotton, pulses, saffron, millet and sesame; and Rabi or Spring crops which include wheat, barley, opium, rape and beans. Since snow fell so soon after the Kharif crops were harvested. Rabi crops could only be planted in fields that had not been under Kharif cultivation. As a result, Kashmiri cultivators had to subsist on a one-crop economy, either Kharif or Rabi.

Rice

Shali (un-husked rice) was the main crop cultivated in the Kashmir valley, since the physical characteristics and climate of the valley lent itself to rice cultivation while preventing the

Intensive farming of most of other crops. Cultivators realised that their labour would not be repaid if they sowed crops other than rice and chose to concentrate on the Kharif production of rice, this being the main food grain of consumption, and the market for other crops was not really sufficient to make their cultivation profitable. Most importantly, rice had the greater yield per acre than any other crop in the valley. While 27 seers of wheat sown per acre yielded only 2 kharwars (1 kharwar =80kg's) of the crop per acre, 22-24 seers of Shali yielded 15 kharwars per acre. As a result, rice accounted for three-fourths of the cultivable area during Sikh period and was the most important crop among food grains in terms of value in the early Dogra period. Walter Lawrence, Settlement Commissioner for the Jammu and Kashmir state, described that Kashmiri cultivator devoted all his energy to rice cultivation: "For rice he will terrace the fields, expand greater labour in digging out irrigation channels, spend his nights out in the fields watching the flow of water, and will pass laborious days in the wet deep mud."

Although other crops such as maize, saffron, cotton, sesame and fruits were grown and harvested, their importance to the peasant economy remained marginal due to the absence of a substantial market for these products 6. Rice cultivation was confined to the flat portions of the valley with alluvial soil, where water could reach with ease and in plenty. It required warm moist climate which was characteristic of this part of the subcontinent. The quantity of seed sown per acre was twenty to twenty four seers and the yield varied from five to thirty kharwars. In hilly areas where rice was grown, the yield was less and the rice was also of inferior quality. In Kashmir ninety four varieties of rice were grown. Among all these varieties Kunjdiyani, Basmati and

Chogul were considered the best. All most all lands under rice cultivation produced only one crop in the year and remained leafless during winter when no cultivation was impossible.

Maize

In order of priority and importance maize came next to rice. On the slopes, the uplands and all those areas in mountains where some amount of cultivation was possible, maize and pulses were grown. Generally the reclaimed swamps and peaty soils are suited for its cultivation because it needed no regular irrigation. The Kashmiri cultivators did not like it and opted indifferently to the maize fields. However, the Gujjars who applied heavy manure grew it abundantly as it formed their main diet and maize cultivation was significant part of their economy. The stalk and leaves of the plant were consumed by their cattle. The Gujjars and cultivators of this crop exchanged it with the rice cultivating peasants. The average yield per kharwar of land was 24 Kharwars of maize. Besides, the shepherds, cowherds and Gujjars, it was consumed by large sections of population in regions where little paddy was grown.

There were two varieties of maize—one red in colour which is tasty and the other is white in colour and called 'bad'eh mak'kaie' (maize in white colour). The former was preferred by the Kashmiri peasants.

Wheat

Topographically, Kashmir does not belong to the wheat growing regions of the sub-continent. Nonetheless it did grow considerable amount of wheat next in importance only to maize. Certain specific areas were reserved for wheat cultivation. Its cultivation in Kashmir was mostly confined to Dachnipora and Khourpora Parganas. It required a climate which is neither too warm nor too cold. Wheat was looked down upon by the Kashmiris as a food, but was mainly grown for bakeries as Kashmiris were fond of taking baked bread along with their salt tea (Noon-Chai). One kharwar of land could produce eight kharwars of wheat.

Barley

It was grown throughout the valley on barani lands which were dependent on rain for moisture. However, in the villages situated at an elevation of 700 ft., a peculiar type of this crop known as 'grin' or 'Tibetan barley' was grown which was the staple food for the people living there. The average yield of land was 8½ mounds of barley and about 4 mounds of 'grin'. Its price varied from 23 seers to two maunds a rupee.

Buck Wheat (Tromba)

Buck wheat was most useful plant grown in the hilly areas requiring less irrigation. It was of two varieties—one called sweet Tromba and another white or pinkish in colour. The latter was often grown as a substitute for rice, in areas where water was scarce. It was mostly consumed in the form of porridge by the people inhabiting Kandi Ilaqas that is hilly areas. The average yield per acre of land was 4½ maund.

Amaranths (Ganhars)

It was grown in cotton fields and also in the maize growing plots. It required no irrigation or manure. With timely rains a good yield of crop was harvested. It also provided an alkaline substance from

its stalk which was used by the washer men and the villagers as a soap.

Kangni (Shol)

Kangni was an extremely useful product sown during the years when there used to be scarcity of water for rice cultivation. It was dry crop and required much labour and weeding. There were two varieties—smaller of red colour, preferred as a food and larger one of white colour. The average yield was 4 ½ maunds to an acre. Channa or 'ping' was another kind resembling Kangni, but such crops were denounced by the Kashmiris for one reason or the other.

Millet (Bajra)

It was also accepted as a staple food grown in Kashmir on the lower hills bordering on the plains. Its stalk was used as a fodder when dry, but cattle were sometimes fed on the young crops as they stood. As a food it was troublesome as it took very long time to cook and was very hard. The average productivity per acre was about 4 ½ maunds. It was of two varieties, red and white, and was husked like rice in a mortar. The people of the plains who cultivated paddy exchanged rice or shali with the people of hilly areas for Bajra.

Pulses

In some parts of the Kashmir the cultivation of pulses co-existed with other crops including paddy and maize. The most popular pulses cultivated were Mong, Moth, Mash, and Raj mash. Mong was a Kharif crop and was entirely dependent on rain. The Banjar lands could produce large quantity of this crop. Moth was considered to be an inferior one among the pulses and was generally used as a fodder for cattle during the winter. Mash was extensively cultivated in hilly/Kandi areas. It was of two varieties: black and green. Both were consumed by the people. The last variety of pulses: Raj mash was of different varieties and was cultivated almost in every pargana. However, the consumption of pulses within the valley was not of the same order as in other parts of India.

Water Nuts (Singharas)

Kashmir known for the production of Singharas/water nuts. European writers like Moorcraft also admitted this fact. Singharas were important horticultural product of Kashmir during the period of this study. It was mostly procured from Wular Lake and small water bodies around Dal Lake. It appears to have contributed a handsome amount to the state exchequer and also as a means of employment to peasants, boatmen and officials.

Besides the above mentioned crops Kashmir also produced a large quantity of cash crops like cotton, tobacco, oil-seeds, saffron etc.

Cotton

It was grown all over the valley on Kare was and also in low-lying irrigable lands, though in small quantity and was grown when the lands required rest from rice. It was not only meant for the fibre used for home manufactured cotton cloth, but also for excellent food for cattle 37. Thirty seers were sown per acre for the return of a produce of 1½ kharwars that is one hundred twenty four seers and eight Chhataks per acre.

Tobacco

Tobacco was cultivated in many parts of the valley. The best quality 'Brewari' was produced in the neighbourhood of Srinagar. It was mostly in the hands of the Gardener class. It required very rich soil. The other variety was that of 'Chilasi'. It was exported to Ladakh.

Oil: Seeds

Oil-seeds were largely grown in Kashmir and the principal oil-seeds included Tilgoglu, Taruz (Sarshaf) and Sandji which came under the head of rape-seed. The first of the Oil seeds Tilgoglu was used for preparing vegetables⁴⁰ whereas the other two varieties were considered best for lighting purposes. Besides these, large quantities of linseed were also produced which was used for eating purpose. Til is a very common crop, which needed rich soil and was to be more carefully looked after than any other oil seed crops. It was sweet and was valued as an ointment. Another type of oil was extracted from walnuts and apricots whose remaining oil cake served as a fodder for livestock

Saffron

Saffron has been (and continues to be) the monopoly of Kashmir from times immemorial. It was grown in two localities namely Pampore wudar i.e., Karewas at a distance of 15 miles from Srinagar near Pampore and on a fairly limited scale in Kishtawar. In Kashmir valley this saffron fields were divided into five feet square beds being surrounded by a six inches deep drainage channel and saffron was ploughed in these beds at a depth of four inches from surface. These saffron fields remained under the crop for around ten years during which period the number of corn was almost doubled. Commercially saffron was the most important crop. In former days the saffron cultivation was a large source of revenue to the state.

Among the fruits common in Kashmir were apple, pear, peach, cherry, apricot, almonds, walnuts and grapes. The last three varieties of fruits were of much economic value, although produced on a very limited scale.

Grapes

These formed an important item in the agrarian economy of Kashmir. There can be no doubt that the grape production was encouraged during Maharaja Ranbir Singh's and Maharaja Pratap Singh's time because of all the fruits it provided a great financial edge to the state. A large portion of produce was used for making wines.

Relatively speaking rice was the most important crop in terms of value among food grains. The most extensive paddy cultivation was likely to have been carried out on the lands near delta and streams which had sufficient scope to facilitate rapid drainage.

Maize was mostly consumed by the poorest section of the peasantry including the small peasants because they could not afford to take rice regularly. In the first instance the peasant himself was left with very little by the state and secondly, in time of need, peasants had to sell their rice and to subsist themselves on maize. And if at all he retained a little of rice he had to exchange it for tea, salt and clothes. He has also to share his portion with the Pandit and Pir as the case might be and with the Banker, the blacksmith, the barber and other village artisans who provided different services to the peasants.

Maize was not eagerly accepted in exchange and even in charity where paddy was available but in Kandi Ilaqas (hilly areas) where maize alone was grown there was hardly any choice. Apart from this pounded maize was given as nourishment to the cattle. Thus in the peasant economy of Kashmir, generally speaking maize too got considerable significance and relevance, for it sustained a large section of the peasant population. Though it was not commercially as important as rice, as a staple food of peasant and the landless labourer it had a significant socio-economic role to play.

Pulses were of course consumed by people now and then particularly during winter months when no leafy vegetables could be obtained due to geo-climatic constraints. Pulses as an agrarian produce does not appear to have been as important as they had been and still are in the Indian plains. In Kashmir, unlike the plains, they formed no part of the regular diet but were meant only for consumption during the scarcity of winters.

1.2 Livestock

Livestock formed an indispensable segment of Kashmir peasant economy. It included cattle like oxen, cows, sheep, goats, horses and poultry. In addition to its commercial value rearing of livestock was a necessity for peasants in order to obtain manure for fields. Oxen were particularly of great significance because they were used to draw the plough. But, the rearing of this animal was expensive for an average peasant as it required a good amount of fodder especially during the winters. The hilly areas especially those which remained under the grip of severe cold during the winter, were faced with some climatic problems and constraints which made it impossible for the peasants living there to keep a sufficient stock of cattle. For example owing to the severe and prolonged winter, land in Kashmir remains almost in a dormant state and consequently bereft of any vegetation for about six months. In these circumstances the Kashmir peasants have to keep his cattle indoor, and feed them exclusively with his own or purchased fodder. As such the peasants were constrained to rear only that number of cattle which could be supported by his personal productive capacity and not by the availability of pastures as was the case with his counterparts elsewhere in India. This problem might not have only restrained the peasant from enlarging his holding to optimum size, but it proved baneful in other way too i.e., the peasant was short of having adequate quantum of cattle dung, the only manure used in Kashmir which prevented him from obtaining sufficient returns from land. Therefore, the peasants with small holding usually owned an ox and those with big holdings possessed more than one. The importance of ox in rural economy of Kashmir can be imagined from the fact that till recently if a village boy wished another boy ill, he would say, "May your ox die". The death of an ox in peasant household was not a minor tragedy because to purchase another was always difficult for an average peasant. During 1890's a pair of plough bullocks costed Rs. 25. Milch cow was also considered as an asset in peasant economy. That is why peasants were repeatedly charged for a milch cow. A cow giving four seers (approximately 4 litres) of milk could be bought for rupees 8, but because of rising price by 1890's it was difficult to obtain such a cow for rupees fifteen. Kashmiris had many proverbs about their cattle. For instance Dand Wayit Gao Chawit (one warns a man to try a plough bullock and to milk a cow before concluding purchase).

Similarly sheep on account of its importance was regarded as sun-e-senz seer (sheep are worth gold bricks). They supply warmth, clothing and manure. A Kashmiri regarded his sheep up to the age of four years as destined for wool production and it was only in dire necessity of an occasion of rejoicing and festivities that he would part with his ewes. In spite of the number of sheep in Kashmir it was often difficult to obtain mutton in the villages for the people required wool and warmth in the winter and the person who possessed plenty of sheep on his ground floor would keep his family warm in the bitter winter 58. A tax of 13 chilki rupees was levied per hundred sheep. This tax called Zar-i-Choupan was collected as the flocks passed up the mountain pastures. Till 1890, the state exercised the privilege of selecting one in every thousand sheep as the flocks passed up the mountains, and one out of every hundred in a flock. The first was known as Hazari or Khilkat and second as Barra.

Pony was of extraordinary importance in peasant economy but, the common peasants could not afford to rear ponies. A few families in a village possessing large holdings and good manpower ventured to tame this animal. In the absence of the cart roads pony carriage was of great importance in Kashmir and was in the hands of a special class called Marka bans. These men did not breed ponies but they bought them from the villagers. Moreover, the affluent section of rural society uses to breed ponies for riding purpose. And impediment in pony breeding was that the villagers possessing ponies were liable to constant requisitions by the state for carriage to Gilgit and Jammu. No remuneration was paid for such kind of services. It had made pony breeding unpopular 60. Just as the sheep were entrusted to the professional choupans, so the ponies were also entrusted to the charge of the Galwans, who looked after long strings of them honestly. The Galwans charged four annas per pony.

Poultry, an important component of livestock was of great importance in peasant's economy. It mainly included chicken and duck. Most of the villagers used to rear poultry as its maintenance was not so expensive. The ducks were exported to Punjab. The best breed of fowl was found in Lolab valley where the practice of making capons was common. A capon was sold at prices varying from 8 to 12 annas. Poultry and eggs were a source of income to villagers but the fowl cholera 'koker-kon' disease which sometimes visited Kashmir caused great loss. The corrupt revenue and forest officials were taking the poultry of the villagers as Rasum.

Nevertheless, it was a considerable source of income in fragile peasant economy 61. Honey was cultivated in the higher villages of the valley, and used to form an item of taxation. One house would often contain many hives and in a good year a hive would give eight seers of honey comb. Bee keeping was allied pursuit apart from cultivation. Honey was produced not only for consumption but also for sale.

Certain peasants also supplemented their income by rearing silkworms. During the period after Kharif plants these silks weavers known as Kiramkash (worm killers) used to practice this supplementary pursuit. The cocoons were transported to Srinagar and prices for its sale were fixed by the government and these often used to be very low 63. However, the earnings from these were negligible and too meagre to substantially add to the low returns from their holdings. It was this class of peasants who took to weaving of blankets and baskets during the off season 64. The migration of this class of peasants was not a taboo and a few of

these, particularly those oppressed by the moneylender's exacting demands left their homes during winter months to earn their livelihood. In undertaking these subsidiary crafts the peasants usually suffered from the greed and rapacity of the middle men.

Conclusion

Thus, the above study elaborated on the possibilities of rural production in a wide-variety of crops and animal wealth in the geo-climatic conditions of Kashmir Valley. It has demonstrated how the geographical structures determined the rural production in the fragile peasant economy of Kashmir. The importance and dominance of shali/paddy was the outcome of multiple factors like physical makeup of the Valley and availability of irrigation facilities.

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