

Agricultural Transformation in Kashmir (1947-1975): Innovations and Economic Growth

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Abstract: *The period from 1947 to 1975 was a watershed movement in the history of Kashmir's economic development, particularly in the agriculture sector. Post-Independence reforms spearheaded by visionary policies, dismantled oppressive feudal structure, redistributing land and empowering small farmers. This era witnessed a paradigm shift as traditional practices gave way to innovation driven farming, characterized by the introduction of mechanization, hybrid seeds, chemicals and advanced irrigation systems. Moreover, the Government played a crucial role by establishing agriculture and horticulture institutions that increase productivity and sustainability. This paper explores the pivotal role of these initiatives in reshaping Kashmir's agrarian economy highlighting their impact on social equity, rural employment and economic resilience.*

Keywords: Kashmir, Agriculture, Technology, Horticulture, Irrigation

1. Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir came into being as a single political and geographical entity following the treaty of Amritsar between the British Government and Maharaja Gulab Singh on March 16, 1846. The treaty is regarded as the "sale treaty" as Kashmir was sold to a mere sum of 75 lakh rupees (nanak shahees). The treaty handed over the control of the state to the Dogra ruler who had earlier annexed Ladakh. Thus, we see that a new state comprising three distinct regions of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh was formed with Maharaja Gulab Singh as its founder.¹

The feudal dispensation in the state was too harsh for the people to live under the autocratic rule while their Indian brethren were fighting for independence from the British under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. On the other hand the people of state were led by a famous personality, the Sher-i-Kashmir who rose against the rule of Dogra. The rulers of the time came down heavily on the people's freedom movement but the people laid their lives in the cause of freedom and to uphold the ideas of secularism, equality, democracy and goodwill.²

The economic system established by the Dogras was designed to protect and promote the interests of the rulers and their collaborators neglecting the welfare of the general masses. The industrial development was almost negligible and the agricultural economy which was the predominant sector was stagnant. The rulers did some relief measures in order to boost the economy but that was almost comical.³

Development of agriculture and land reforms:

After Independence there was a dramatic change in the agrarian and non-agrarian sector of the state. The newly formed Government under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah emphasized on the need of transferring land to the actual tiller. The main Emphasis of the "Naya Kashmir" manifesto were abolition of absentee landlordism, distribution of all kinds of land to peasantry, farming and marketing of agricultural produce, introducing

scientific methods of agriculture, promoting sheep, livestock and dairy farming, utility service and currency and finance. The main objective was to provide a reasonable standard of living for the people in the state and the production was to be used and not for the exchange. A national Agriculture council was to be set up in the state to execute and supervise the national agricultural plan.

The manifesto also highlights the role of the industrial sector in the growth of the state economy and various steps were taken to make the industries to be in the government hands, so we see there was "abolition of private capitalist", "key industries to be managed by democratic state", "private monopoly to be forbidden". We see that a National Industrial Council was set up to direct, supervise and control the industrial effort along the lines of the national plan.⁴

In order to curb the backwardness of the state it was realized that the nature of transport and communication should develop rapidly, so a National Communication Consisting of engineering experts and economic advisers were to be set up who would execute the plan in consultation with the agriculture and industrial councils. Every working man, woman and child in state "was guaranteed freedom from want but no parasite was to be granted a share in consumption goods.

The National Economic Council, composed of bankers and financial experts, was set up for financial plans of the state and steps were taken such as "provide necessary funds for all productive organizations", "fix the total wage bills" and "regulate the price level". Banking was to be nationalized and the currency to be regulated strictly on a national basis. The social parasites like money-lenders and insurers have no place in the planned economy.

On 17th October 1950, Big Landed Estates Abolition Act was passed in order to bring relief to the cultivators and development of agriculture in the state. The act brought immense change as it changed the whole structure of village life. The land was transferred to the cultivator without any

compensation. The data shows that 9000 properties were expropriated from 4.50 lakh acres of land held in excess of ceiling. Out of this, 2.3 lakh acres of land were transferred in ownership right to the tillers free of any compensation while the remaining part of the land was taken over by the state. However, there were certain limitations of the act such as geographical contiguity in fixing the ceiling limits for owners and no weightage was given to fertility of soil. The landless agricultural laborers did not get ownership of land. ⁵

The period from 1955 to 1965 witnessed the passing of tenancy (amendment acts) that gave more rights to tenants. These acts were able to remove the defection of the land reforms that were creating problems between landlords and other sections of society. In order to boost the economy to new heights, the state government came with another act known as “Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms act of 1972. The act brought the tiller into direct contact with the state and abolished the intermediaries. The Main provisions of the act were Transferring land ownership to the people who work it, setting a ceiling on the amount of land a family could own and Distribution of land that was not being used.

In order to remove the defects and to review it with a view to provide more equitable distribution and better utilization of land suited to the circumstances of the state, the Jammu and Kashmir Reforms act 1972 was kept in suspension from 25th of March 1975 by means of J&K Agrarian Reforms (suspension of Operation) Act 1975 and a new act was passed known as J&K Agrarian Reforms Act 1967. ⁶

Main objectives of the act are:

- 1) Provide surplus land to the landless and poor.
- 2) Fixes ceiling on land.
- 3) Ensure that with a few exceptions which are in general public interest ownership follows personal cultivation.
- 4) Transfer ownership rights in land to tillers thereof except in case of land belonging to places of worship including Gumpas of Ladakh, public trusts or institution of a charitable nature.
- 5) Provide rehabilitation facilities for parties expropriated from land by permitting resumption in certain cases.

Production Programmes

The Second Five Year plan came with the concept of Community Development. The Stress was given to cultivate more land with the extension of agriculture. In 1961, intensive Agricultural Development programs were launched in two districts of Jammu and Anantnag as they had the availability of irrigation facilities and were less prone to natural hazards. Besides use of improved seeds, practices, plant production and pesticides were also distributed. ⁷

Distribution of Fertilizers in Jammu and Kashmir between 1954 and 56

Year	On subsidies and deferred payments	Free gifts
1954-55	12900	8000
1955-56	44000	24000
1956-57	29300	28785

Source: Administration report, 1953-54, Government of Jammu and Kashmir

Measurement of land in Kashmir

The Peasants in the valley usually referred to his area of land in terms of Trakh, Kanal and Mannut.

- 1) One Mannut of land is equal to 10 Marlas of land.
- 2) One Kanal is equal to two Manuts or 20 Marlas.
- 3) One Trakh is equal to two kanals or four Mannut or 40 Marlas.

Development of Irrigation and Technology

The history of the Kashmir irrigation system is as old as hills. According to the Nilmatpurana and Rajatarangni, irrigation starts from the time of Prajapatikashyapa

Who cut down the mountain ring of the valley at Baramulla and let the water flow out to lower elevations. The record preserved by Kalhana pandit of the ancient kings shows how water was provided to the high elevations like the Samtara-Damodar.

The irrigation system mainly started with the work of “Suyya” who drew the water from the Mahapadma Lake (now called wular). He also regulated the flow of Jhelum and Sindh to suit normal irrigation to the agricultural lands.

During the time of Zain-ul- Abidin (A.D), many canals, raising dams and elevated riverbanks were constructed. The Karewas were provided irrigation by the technique of storage of water by digging a system of canals on higher elevations.

We see that the valley of Kashmir was submerged during the rule of Dogras due to floods from 1983 to 1903. Drastic measures were taken especially digging of new canals, erection of bunds and deepening of rivers to check floods. Many canals were opened such as Martand Canal, Zainagiri Canal, Nandi Canal, Latipur Canal and other canals to store water for irrigation.

The credit for real irrigation work started under the reign of Maharaja Pratap Singh. The flood spill channel at padshahi Bagh, Hokarsar, Naugam and the Dudganga Nallahs (canals) were completed with success. The dredging of the outfall channel from Sopore to Khadanyar was put into operation, reclaiming land in the Shahgund area near the Wular Lake. The Martand Canal was extended and remodelled.

After Independence, the newly formed government put a lot of measures in order to provide necessary infrastructure for agricultural development. The irrigation department was separated from public works Development. During the First Five-Year plan Rs. 1.70 crores were utilized on irrigation works. The data shows the Dry Farm lands came under irrigation as below.

- 1) Dry Farmlands irrigated by canals - 10,500 acres
- 2) Dry Farmlands irrigated by lift canals- 4,978 -----
- 3) Remodelling of Kulhs 30,400 ----
- 4) Reclaimed Lands 300 -----

Many lift irrigation stations were built on the western banks of Jhelum River in the villages like Dogripora, Delina, Padgampora, letapora and Burru. The result of extending the irrigation facilities to the uncultivated lands and irrigation which was already available to the cultivated land increased

the production at an average of 9.6 % during the first Five Year plan. The productivity of wheat, maize and paddy was significantly increased as compared to 1951-52. Between 1951-52 and 1964-67, the production of food in the state increased from 83 lakh to 170 lakh mounds and the annual growth rate of 8.9% registered during first Five Year Plans was than all India average of 5.13% per annum.

Livestock

The old system of agricultural economy mostly depends on livestock and is still followed where primitive methods of cultivation are still in use. The oxen were used to plough the land for agriculture purposes. Horses and ponies were used to supply goods from one place to another. In every village it was the duty of patwari to keep a record of livestock in his land record. This process was known as Goshwar. Cattle were reared for milk, manure and draught power

After 1947 there was a dramatic change in the development of the livestock sector. The state government transformed the civil veterinary Department into Animal Husbandry. Further for the up gradation of cattle in order to have a good breed, we see that two breeding farms were established one each at Srinagar and other at Jammu. The people were engaged in animal rearing which helped them to earn their income in a significant way that in turn helped the other sectors like transportation. Sheep farming became a cornerstone of Kashmir's livestock industry especially for the production of wool and mutton. The state undertook various programs to improve breeds for better wool quality through crossbreeding. The Government provides subsidies and loans to farmers for livestock rearing. Along with this, dairy cooperatives were established to boost milk production and distribution.⁸

Sericulture: - Kashmir is best known for its silk production and best quality as compared to those of other states. The history of Sericulture in Kashmir is known to have existed from ancient times but was not in a good shape. According to Mirza Haider (A.D, 1536), there was an abundance of mulberry trees present in the valley and the people used the leaves of these trees for the purpose of food only for silkworms. The industry flourished during the time of Zain-ul-abidin as proper attention was paid to it.

During the rule of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the silk industry reached to its new height and 127 fine rearing houses were built. The machinery and reeling equipment were imported from Europe and a separate department was established for the purpose of developing silk business in the valley. A group of guilds were created that were known as Kirm Kash (literally worm-killers). However we see that these guilds used to harass people for their own benefits and they were hated by the people. The business was also wholly official and the revival was too ambitious. The people were afraid of cutting any mulberry tree and if anyone found guilty he was punished. In 1878 there was a calamity that befell on the silk industry and it was hit by disease. The quantity of seed diminished, and industry almost collapsed.⁹

After Independence, the state government paid much attention to the sericulture industry. The focus was to generate more employment in order to create more and more

avenues for the people associated with this sector. The industry plays a notable role in the life of people of rural areas. It continues to be a subsidiary occupation for about 27000 rural families in the state.

Horticulture:

Horticulture is the science and art of growing plants, vegetables, flowers etc. Kashmir is famous for horticulture production as the topography, climate, soil, irrigation system provide a suitable opportunity in order to grow and cultivate a variety of fruits such as apple, pear, walnuts, almonds, peach, raspeberry, strawberry and mulberry etc. The people of Kashmir use these fruits as food in time of need and also sell them in markets to earn their livelihood.

During the time of Dogras, many initiatives were taken to enhance the growth of fruit cultivation. In this regard, the horticulture sector made progressive steps with the establishment of the Department of Agriculture-Sericulture in 1906 that was later separated into the Department of Agriculture and Sericulture. The fruit trees were imported from European countries and nurseries were established with different kinds of fruit plants that were given to the farmers. However the measures were not sufficient as they did not meet the requirements of the orchardists for plants required for renewal of dead or dissipated trees in the existing orchards. Despite all these efforts, the condition of the horticulture sector during the Dogra period remains downplayed and the cropping pattern is still controlled by food crops.¹⁰

After Independence, the horticulture sector in the valley flourished and generated new avenues for the farmers. The farmers took the initiative of converting marginal lands, hilly slopes, pastures and other lands into orchards. Further, the government took the measure step by creating a separate "Horticulture Department" that was responsible for creating awareness among the people regarding the benefits of this sector. Moreover, the "Area Development Programme" was started jointly by State Horticulture with Agriculture Refinance Corporation of India "in which more land was brought under cultivation. Besides, many programmes were launched that upsurge the production of fruits in the valley. The opening of new roads and linking of state with the other parts of India helped in the export of fruits that also boosted the fruit sector. The production rose from 16,000 metric tonnes in 1953-54 to 8 lakh metric tonnes at the end of 7th five year plan (Govt. of Jammu and Kashmir, Eight five year plan, Department of planning).¹¹

2. Conclusion

The agricultural transformation in Kashmir between 1947 and 1975 was characterized by both remarkable progress and persistent challenges. The reforms initiated by the state government aimed to address deep-rooted social inequalities, empowering marginalized farmers and access to resources. The abolition of the zamindari system was a landmark achievement which not only redistributed land to tenant farmers but also broke the stronghold of land owners on the agriculture economy.

Further technological innovation in irrigation and tools, introduction of modern crops, expansion of agriculture research led to increased agriculture productivity. The state's focus on improving the agriculture infrastructure besides making roads, storage facilities and marketing also contributed to improving the living standard of farmers. . The formation of cooperatives helped in organizing farmers, promoting collective action and enhancing their bargaining power boosted more opportunities for economic development.

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