

## Peasant in History of Kashmir

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The word Peasant is derived from the old French word *Paisant* meaning country dweller which is based on Latin word *Pagus* meaning country district. Cambridge dictionary describes peasant as a “person who owns or rents a small piece of land and grows crops, keeps animals, etc. on it, especially one who has a low income, very little education and a low social position. This is usually used of someone who lived in the part or of someone in a poor country.” Similarly, Oxford dictionary defines peasant as “a small holder or agricultural labour of low social status.” This somber image of a peasant was reflected in most of the modern works which did not gave them ample space in the reconstruction of the history of a region and negated their role in its all round development.

The study of the history of a peasant was not given much relevance in the modern times until the subaltern studies came into the fore. With the advent of bottom up studies of people whose history had been previously ignored, the study of the history of peasants came into prominence. This led to the flourishing of the social history from below asserting the importance of peasants as a significant component in the development of the history of a region. Even the term subaltern had peasant origin as in late Medieval English, subaltern term was applied to peasant and vassals. Subaltern studies gave prominence to the history of peasants over and above the state centred historical research.

The history of peasants in India started with the advent of Neolithic revolution when the domestication of plants had started. The origin of peasants in a society will only take place with the establishment of agriculture and Neolithic revolution provided every essential ingredient to the people to start the cultivation of crops. Agriculture was started as a family affair and the members of the same family spent their time in cultivating and harvesting, and later on, incorporated members of other families also and in this process the food gatherers and hunters of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic times turned into food producers. This led to the evolution of peasant as a basic unit of social organization.

The first urban revolution in India is coincided with the Indus civilization which was only possible with a surplus production in agriculture. The discovery of ploughed field at Kalibangan corroborates the agricultural activities at the time of Indus civilization. The state, as is said, appropriated the surplus production and stored it in the various granaries of the region to be distributed amongst its subjects. This gave fillip to

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the trade and commerce of the region at not only local and inter-regional level but international also.

The early Vedic society was considered to be a nomadic and pastoral society in which there was no concept of ownership of land and wealth was seen mainly in the form of cows, horses, camels etc. This view was advanced by D.D Kosambi who said that "there is nothing about division of land or land ownership, let alone buying or selling land, or for that matter any commodities. The main source of wealth, its very measure was cattle; in the second line, horses."<sup>1</sup> The Rig Vedic society hardly produced any surplus but such was not the case in the times of Later Vedic period when there occurred a transition from pastoral to agriculture based economy. R.S Sharma calls this society as non-monetary peasant society in which large scale agriculture led to the development and consolidation of the institution of state. This view also finds support from D.N. Jha who writes that "The Later Vedic people became settled and sedentary and they could perhaps produce enough for themselves and to a certain extent for the support of the priests and the ruling class."<sup>2</sup>

D.D. Kosambi also advances the view that there was transition from the pastoral-raider to agrarian food processing economy in the times of Later Vedic period which led to the increase in food supply on a regular basis.<sup>3</sup> But the surplus produced in agriculture was not adequate enough to support all the people engaged in non-agricultural occupations. R.S.Sharma puts forth the reason for less production in the Later Vedic times to the primitive techniques used by the peasants and the less agricultural knowledge. According to him, "On account of their primitive agriculture; peasants could not produce much for consumption and accumulation by non producers. They generally worked with the wooden ploughshare, and their agricultural knowledge was not very advanced. Further, peasants possessed only as much land as could be worked with the help of their family members and even kings lent their hands to the plough."<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the ownership rights in the Later Vedic period, Irfan Habib has remarked that the rich peasants were masters of their fields and the larger population comprised the subjected lot who worked on the fields for their masters. According to him, "The peasants were masters of their own fields (*Ksetrapati*). But such free peasants belonged to the superior tribes: a larger population would seem to have comprised the subjected *dasyu* communities compelled to part with grain and kine. In the lowest levels were the *dasas* working like cattle, presumably on the field or tending the herds, for their masters. At the apex were the aristocracy (*rajanyas*) proudly driving in their chariots with *Indra* as their model, and the priests (*brahmanas*) who presided over animal sacrifices and a complex ritual. A celebrated hymn in Book X of the Rig Veda offers a picture of this class divided society whose creation the hymn seeks to ascribe to divinity. However simplified, the *varna* scheme of the hymn seems to reflect faithfully the deep division of the peasantry into its free *vis* and the servile *dasyus*, who, transmuted as *Vaisyas* and *Sudras*, from respectively the third and fourth *Varnas*."<sup>5</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C acted as a watershed in the agricultural history of India when the forest rich Indo-Gangetic basin was cleared with the help of iron axes and agriculture was commenced in its fertile areas. The use of iron ploughshare as an important agricultural tool led to the production of a surplus which further contributed for the rise of

towns and traders. According to R.S.Sharma, "Once the forested areas of the middle Ganga basin were cleared with the help of the iron axe, one of the most fertile parts of the world was opened to settlement. With the help of iron ploughshare and other tools peasants produced a good deal more than what they needed for their subsistence."<sup>6</sup>

Manu, a law giver of the ancient times, has specifically enunciated the ownership rights of the peasants. He says that the field belonged to one who cleared the timber and a deer to one who first wounded it. This principle was not followed everywhere as stratification existed within the peasantry and some peasant cultivators possessed their own lands and some were just mere sharecroppers. According to Irfan Habib, "There was within the peasantry itself a considerable degree of stratification: there were large number who were mere sharecroppers on the field of others. When Manu says that the field belong to one who "first cleared away the timber", he is possibly thinking of peasant cultivators possessing their own field. But he says elsewhere that the claims of "the owner of the field" have precedence over the actual tiller ("owner of the seed"), and the latter can only be a sharecropper. Yajnavalkya underlines this when he says that the owner of the field (*Kestraswami*) had the right to assign it to a cultivator of his choice."<sup>7</sup>

There was a complete transformation in the position of peasants in early Medieval India due to the introduction of land grants to the people in lieu of their salaries. Land was also given to religious people on charitable basis with all the right to 'cultivate it or get it cultivated'. The most significant result of land grants was the emergence of a class of landlords and subjected peasantry. The landlords lived on the produce of the peasantry and collected rent from them on the ground that they were owners of the land.<sup>8</sup> The system of land grants eroded the rights of the peasants on their land. Highlighting the condition of the peasantry, R.S.Sharma writes, "They were specifically transferred to the beneficiaries, asked to stay in the donated villages and carry out the orders of the new masters."<sup>9</sup> Most of the land charters of early Medieval India give proof of the conditions of the peasants who were asked to carry out the orders of the beneficiaries of the land grants.<sup>10</sup>

The condition of the peasants was further aggravated with the imposition of forced labour and various new levies and taxes imposed on them by their new owners. According to D.N.Jha, "The practice of making land grants gave rise to feudal agrarian relations and forms of exploitation which generated much social tension leading to peasant protest of which considerable evidence is available from the 9-10<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards."<sup>11</sup>

Under the Sultanate of Delhi, several economic and technological changes were made which influenced the life and conditions of the peasants substantially and the latter intensified their activities in terms of extension of cultivated areas. They also produced both food grains and cash crops meant for market. The feudal structure of the society in the preceding centuries gave way to a centralized polity with the establishment of the Sultanate. Mohammed Habib has described these changes as an urban revolution in which the balance shifted in favour of the towns and its inhabitants as "the old caste cities of the Rajput period were thrown open to all types of people-high and low, workers and artisans, Hindus and Muslims, Chandalas and Brahmans."<sup>12</sup> According to Irfan Habib, "The shift of the balance in favour of the town as against country is an important element

of Medieval Indian economic History. The evidence for the Sultanate, literary as well as numismatic, suggests a fairly noticeable upsurge in urban life. It is likely that in the Mughal empire the urban population amounted to as much as 15% of the total, a distinctly higher proportion than at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>13</sup> This large proportion of the urban population was dependent on the surplus extracted from the peasantry. A cursory look at the contemporary sources of the medieval period clearly shows that during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the land-man ratio was very favourable. During this period, large scale cultivable land was yet to be brought under cultivation. Infact, it was the period of land abundance. It is evident from the contemporary sources that the large tracts of Gangetic plains were still under forests. Land availability in abundance kept the peasants engaged in agricultural activities continuously. It is also corroborated by Moreland's statement when he says that "land was waiting for men with the resources necessary for its cultivation."<sup>14</sup> Thus, peasant's scope in agriculture remained alive in a continuous process and they were able to cultivate the land so as to provide surplus to the state.

Peasant as a social group managed the agrarian activities with the assistance of the state. In the Medieval period, the relation between the peasants and state was two-bound i.e, State as protector of the peasants and peasant as revenue payer to the state. State protected the interests of the peasants through the various relief measures introduced for their welfare. It is evident that the state exempted or remitted land revenue in case of failure of crops and even provided loan to them at the time of famine as is in the case of Mohammed Tughluq who granted *Sondhar* to the famine stricken people. On the other hand, peasants were duty bound to pay land revenue to the state so as to enjoy various facilities of the state. They even paid various customary cesses in the form of *Kismat-i-Khuti*, *Haqq-i-Sharb*, etc. which were the regular contributions of the peasants for the maintenance of village resources.

The social structure of the peasantry during the Sultanate period continued to operate in the Mughal period also with some slight circumstantial changes. Peasants or *Raiyats* were broadly divided into 2 categories: *Khud-Kashta* and *Pahi-Kashta*. *Khud-Kashta* were the peasants who held land in the villages where they lived and cultivated it whereas *Pahi-Kashta* held land outside their native villages. According to Satish Chandra, "Thus, resident status in the village, ownership of the land, and cultivating the land with the help of family labour, supplemented by hired labour were the characteristic features of the *Khud-Kasht*."<sup>15</sup> He further adds that "the *Pahi* or *Pahi-Kashta* who came from neighbouring villages or *parganas* to cultivate surplus land, or to resettle a ruined village or to settle a new one."<sup>16</sup> The land rights of both *Khud-Kashta* and *Pahi-Kashta* were to be retained by them.

Peasant mobility was well accepted in the medieval period for their better financial position. Mughal emperor Babur emphasizes on the peasant migration from one area to the other in search of better land. It shows the preference of the peasants for the land of their choice and the recognition of their land rights by the state. According to him, "In Hindustan, hamlets and villages, towns, indeed, are depopulated and set up in a moment! If the people of a large town, one inhabited for years even, flee from it, they do it in such a way that not a sign or trace of them remains in a day or a day and a half. On

the other hand, if they fix their eyes on a place in which to settle, they need not dig water-courses or construct dams because their crops are all rain grown, and as the population of Hindustan is unlimited, it swarms it. They make a tank or dig a well; they need not build houses or set up walls-Khas grass abounds, wood is unlimited, huts are made, and straightaway there is a village or a town."<sup>17</sup>

The land rights of the peasants bring us to an important question of the ownership of land in India during the medieval period. Bernier's notion that land in India belonged to the king and that the "king is the proprietor of the land"<sup>18</sup> started the debate on the ownership of land. But, it did not find any support in the contemporary literary as well as official documents which portray an altogether different picture. The availability of uncultivated land though fit for cultivation i.e. *Uftada-Laik-i-Ziraat* in the medieval period substantiates the fact that whosoever cultivated the land became its owner. The compulsion on the cultivator to cultivate the land was not because he was a serf but because he was a member of the society to which he contributes in his own little way by paying taxes.

The *Farman* of the reign of Aurangzeb addressed to Mohammed Hashim gives evidence to the claim that the land belonged to the cultivator. According to Irfan Habib, "The *Farman* addressed to Mohammed Hashim provides that if the cultivator-*Malik* was found incapable of cultivating the land or abandoned it altogether, it was to be given to another for cultivation, so that there was no loss of revenue. But if at any time the original *Malik* recovered his ability to cultivate the land, or returned to it, the land was to be restored to him."<sup>19</sup> This order of the emperor that the land of the cultivator which could be cultivated by someone else during his absence or on his disability was to be returned back to him as soon as he returned to cultivate is a clear indication towards the recognition of the proprietary rights of the cultivator by the state. The terms *Malik-i-Zamin* and *Arbab-i-Zamin* used for the peasants further corroborate their ownership rights.

Irfan Habib postulates that the recognition of the peasant's right of ownership was due to the state's fear of peasants leaving the land at a time when the land was in abundance and peasants were scarce. According to him, "The willingness of the state to recognize the peasant's right of occupancy, and its anxiety to prevent him from leaving the land, were both natural in an age when land was relatively abundant, and peasants scarce."<sup>20</sup> Regarding scarcity of peasants, Moreland has substantiated it mostly on the basis of Bernier's account who attributed it to the heavy assessment of land revenue which led to decrease in number of the peasants in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He further remarks that the main concern of the period was the "scarcity of peasants, and their readiness to abscond."<sup>21</sup>

During the Medieval period, the peasant production increased manifold due to certain improvements in the agricultural tools, introduction of new crops, improvement in irrigation facilities etc. The foremost among these was the Persian wheel or *Saqia*. It was based on pin drum gearing system. The geared wheel was rotated by the oxen going round in circles. Babur has referred to its use in Dipalpur, Lahore and other neighbouring areas. The introduction of Persian wheel led to the diffusion of agricultural communities in every part of the Indus basin and subsequently increased the production. According to

Irfan Habib, "There appears to have taken place a transformation of a large pastoral, camel or cattle rearing population into an agricultural community, in the Indus basin sometime between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, accompanied by a possible migration of portions of that community from the middle of the basin to the north and then to the east and south eastwards. This development broadly synchronizes with the diffusion of the Persian wheel, which process to judge from Babur's statements, had been completed in the region by the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and also with the reclamation of large areas in the Panjab which allegedly took place during the 15<sup>th</sup> century...the Persian wheel upon its introduction caused a critical change in the agricultural situation in the Indus basin, leading in due course to a considerable influx of previously pastoral elements into the ranks of the peasantry."<sup>22</sup>

The digging of canals on a widespread basis led to the increase in the extent of cultivation which had direct effects on the prosperity of the peasantry. The first ruler of Medieval India who was credited for the promotion of irrigation and the digging of canals was Ghiyasuddin Tughluq but it was Firuz Shah Tughluq who built a number of canals so that the peasantry had not to depend on rains for cultivation. It is said that canal irrigation enhanced the cultivation in the region and where previously only autumn crops were grown but after its introduction, the rabi or spring crops could also be grown such as in Hissar Firoza. This process of digging of canals continued in the Mughal period and numerous canals were dug and water was cut from the rivers to be furnished to the various fields such as Shahjahan's *Nahr-i-Faiz* which cut water from the Yamuna river.

Medieval Indian peasants were known for producing the largest number of crops, both food and non-food. The Indian peasants were proficient in not only growing multiple crops but were always ready to accept new crops as the seventeenth century is known in the agricultural history of India for the introduction of two crops-tobacco and maize. For multiple crops, peasants practiced various advance techniques not known even to the European peasants like the rotation of crops. The role of the peasants in the agrarian economy of a village can be gauged from the fact that the majority of the items of commercial use were procured from land produce such as indigo, cotton, sugarcane, opium, spices etc. These cash crops were the basic contributions of the peasants towards the various industries developing in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The merchant and industrial activities were largely subjected by the cultivation of these crops and the flow of these articles from the villages to the towns was the dominant aspect of trade and commerce of the region.

The role of the medieval peasantry in the agricultural economy cannot be undermined as they were the sole contributors of surplus produce to the state but their economic condition was not as satisfactory as it should have been. It seems that because of the sharing of their produce with the state or village headmen, *zamindars*, nobility etc. and also their dependence on the bankers and merchants for the selling of their produce, peasants were left with just minimum returns hardly enough for their survival. The scantiness of their clothing can be well substantiated by the remark of Babur who says that the "Peasant and people of low standing go about naked."<sup>23</sup> Contemporary sources report that the peasants generally lived in thatched houses made of mud and were poor in quality. As far as the diet of the peasants is concerned, it mostly consisted of coarse

grains, pulses, vegetables etc. which were of low varieties as Irfan Habib also substantiates that "it was the coarsest varieties out of his produce which the peasant was able to retain for his own family."<sup>24</sup>

The two way relationship between the state and the peasants changed into a triangular relationship with the emergence of *Zamindars* as a dominant social group. The Indian feudal lords obtained the designation of the *zamindars* of the Mughal period. These zamindars were permitted to evict the peasantry from his land and rent out the land to someone else. Apart from collecting legal taxes from the peasants, they also collected some illegal and miscellaneous taxes and cesses which proved discouraging for the peasants. It led to the peasant mobilization to those areas where zamindars were not the dominant class.

Despite the state's claim as the promoter and protector of the rights of the peasantry, the peasants of Medieval India seemed to be bereft of satisfactory living and were forced to fight for their bare survival. They had to face oppression of both the ruling class and the *zamindars* and as Irfan Habib has observed, "Medieval peasantry was thus beset by a dual exploitation of the ruling class and the zamindars."<sup>25</sup> Even if this dual exploitation was not enough, the Medieval peasantry had also to face another kind of oppression in the form of natural calamities like flood and famines. The nature's fury took heavy toll on the lives of the peasantry and led to their economic as well as social stagnation. All these oppressions, natural as well as man-made led to peasant revolts in the medieval period. The root cause of some of these revolts was the heavy demand of land tax at a time when their mere survival was also in question for example the peasant revolt in the time of Muhammed Tughluq in the doab region. According to Irfan Habib, "Peasant uprisings span medieval India; their immediate provocation seems uniformly to have been the demand for payment of land revenue."<sup>26</sup>

The system of jagirs and their regular transfers also led to the exploitation of the peasantry and created a situation of agrarian crisis in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The regular transfers of jagirdars from one jagir to another diminished their interests in following an agricultural policy for the welfare of the peasantry. In order to garner immediate personal benefits, the jagirdars ruined the revenue paying capacity of the peasants through their oppressive acts. The continuous oppression led to the abandonment of the agricultural activities by the peasantry which further created conditions of less cultivation. In extreme cases, the peasants were forced to abscond to other areas, either in search of entirely new profession or continuing with the same one in a new place. According to Irfan Habib, "There is a continuous stream of statements in our authorities to the effect that the oppression increased with the passage of time, cultivation fell off and the number of absconding peasants grew."<sup>27</sup>

Thus the medieval peasantry had to come across both the happy conditions in terms of large scale productions, multiplicity of crops, protecting their interests by the state etc. and also the distressful conditions in the form of official oppression by the *jagirdars*, *zamindars*, their agents etc.

Like other regions of India, Kashmir was also predominantly a region primarily based on agrarian economy. Both literary sources of Kashmir and foreign accounts depict Kashmir as a picturesque valley embellished with unparalleled landscapes, green

pastures, forests, rivers, lakes, lofty mountain ranges, abundant varieties of fruit and ornamental trees. Much has been written about its eternal beauty and charm and is known to the outside world as a paradise on earth. Kalhana, author of *Rajatarangini*, has mentioned Kashmir as a country which cannot be conquered by the soldiers but by the force of spiritual merits and even the sun does not burn fiercely to show respect to the country that has been created by Kasyapa. He further adds that some things available in Kashmir are difficult to be found even in heaven also. According to him, "That country may be conquered by the force of spiritual merits, but not by the forces of soldiers. Hence its inhabitants are afraid only of the world beyond...Out of respect, as it were, the sun does not burn fiercely, during summer even, in that (country) which has been created by his father (Kasyapa), as he knows that it ought not to be tormented...Learning, lofty houses, saffron, icy water, grapes, things that even in heaven are difficult to find, are common there."<sup>28</sup> Pandit Suka considered Kashmir as a second heaven and remarked that "even the king of the serpent with his two thousand tongues, cannot describe the glories of the country."<sup>29</sup> These observations of the chroniclers of Kashmir find support in the medieval chroniclers and travel accounts which also appreciate Kashmir for its exquisite beauty. Mughal association with the nature of lands and soils can be estimated from the fact that most of the literary sources from Abul Fazl onwards deal with Kashmir in a thematic way whereas other provinces hardly get such space in Mughal chronicles as Kashmir. It is a well-established fact that Mughal empire was divided into *Subahs* and Kashmir first remained with the *Subah* of Kabul and under Shahjahan, it was made full fledged *Subah*. However, both the *Akbarnama* and *Ain-i-Akbari* devote several pages on Kashmir of which major portion are on the life and conditions of the people of Kashmir. Some of the observations are as follows:

Abul Fazl, the Mughal chronicler of the times of Akbar was mesmerized by the landscape of Kashmir and its natural beauty. According to him, "The country is enchanting, and might be fittingly called a garden of perpetual spring surrounding a citadel terraced to the skies, and deservedly appropriate to be either the delight of the worldling or the retired abode of the recluse. Its streams are sweet to the taste, its waterfall music to the ear, and its climate is invigorating."<sup>30</sup>

Mughal emperor Jahangir considered Kashmir as a paradise and he was often seen commenting that he had no words to describe the enchanting beauty of Kashmir. According to him, "If one were to take to praise Kashmir, whole books would have to be written. Accordingly a mere summary will be recorded...Kashmir is a garden of eternal spring or an iron fort to a palace of kings- a delightful flower bed, and a heart expanding heritage for dervishes. Its pleasant meads and enchanting cascades are beyond all description."<sup>31</sup>

Inayat Khan<sup>32</sup>, author of *Shahjahannama*, considered Kashmir as one of the most favoured regions in the world in terms of its charming and exuberant features. According to him, "Without any doubt it is one of the most favoured spots in the world; or rather it is a combination of the best of all of them, on account of the fresh and bracing salubrity of the climate, the luxuriance of the vegetation and foliage, the abundance of delicious fruits, and the constant succession of lovely gardens and pleasant islands- as well as springs, lakes, cascades and parterres. No other kingdom on the face of the globe has yet

been discovered by the most experienced traveller that possesses such peculiarly charming features.”<sup>33</sup>

Francois Bernier<sup>34</sup> was also charmed by the exquisiteness of Kashmir. According to him, “You have no doubt discovered before this time that I am charmed with Kachemire. In truth, the Kingdom surpasses in beauty all that my warm imagination had anticipated. It is probably unequalled by any country of the same extent, and should be, as in former ages, the seat of sovereign authority, extending his dominion over all the circumjacent mountains, even as far as Tartary and over the whole of Hindoustan, to the island of Ceylon.”<sup>35</sup>

A lot has been said about the beauty, exquisiteness and charm of Kashmir but the various social institutions which helped Kashmir in its overall development did not find enough mention in the various accounts on Kashmir. Peasants being considered the lowest stratum of society did not find much space in the history of Kashmir and their lot was neglected by the native as well as foreign chroniclers. Some scattered references are found of the peasantry of Kashmir which is too inadequate to help building up their full account. Kashmir was formerly a large lake in ancient times and the land for cultivation was not available. This fact is corroborated by Kalhana who mentions that “Formerly, since the beginning of the kalpa, the land in the womb of the himalaya was filled with water during the periods of the (first) six Manus (and formed) the lake of Sati...Afterwards when the present period of the (seventh) Manu Vaivasvata had arrived, the Prajapati Kasyapa caused the gods led by Druhina, Upendra and Budra to descend, caused (the demon) Jalodbhava, who dwelt in that (lake), to be killed, and created Kashmir in the space (previously occupied by) the lake.”<sup>36</sup>

These conditions were not favourable for the peasants of Kashmir who did not had the required resources to cultivate crops. Kalhana further adds that the floods were recurrent in Kashmir which created water locked conditions and reduced the agricultural productions. According to him, “This country of Kashmir always (before) gave small produce, as it was (liable to be) flooded by the waters of the Mahapadma lake, and was intersected by (many) streams”.<sup>37</sup> King Lalitaditya of Karkota dynasty is credited with large scale drainage operations in the valley which helped in the lessening of floods and led to increase in agricultural produce. According to Aurel Stein, “Lalitaditya is credited with having supplied villages near Cakradhara: Tsakdar with the means of irrigation by the construction of a series of water wheels (*araghatta*) which raised the water of the Vitasta.”<sup>38</sup> Agricultural conditions were further enhanced with the improvements in the drainage system of the valley introduced by Suyya, a minister of King Avantivarman. He regulated the course of Jhelum river which relieved the people of the valley from the disastrous floods and famines. Appreciating the works of Suyya which provided relief to the people, Kalhana writes, “Then through the merits of Avantivarman there descended to the earth the lord of food (*annapati*) himself, (in the person of) the illustrious Suyya, to give fresh life to the people.”<sup>39</sup> Kalhana further records that Suyya “embellished all regions with an abundance of irrigated fields which were distinguished for excellent produce”.<sup>40</sup>

These innovative changes led to the reclamation of land and made it available for agriculture. Increase in production was the obvious consequence which brought

prosperity in the lives of the peasantry and who could in turn whole heartedly fulfill their duty towards agriculture. It is also evident from the mention of Kalhana who writes that the villagers were "wholly absorbed in agriculture."<sup>41</sup> Even the kings of Kashmir realized the importance of agriculture from revenue point of view and started cultivating the land themselves. Kalhana has mentioned that King Samkaravarman (883-902 A.D) "cultivated the land himself as (if he were) an agriculturist."<sup>42</sup>

With the passage of time, the prosperous conditions of peasantry became pitiable as the new kings were feeble and neglected the affairs of the state. Peasants had to pay innumerable taxes and fines apart from the heavy revenue demand which was realized in kind. The civil wars in the valley further brought misery to the peasantry as the soldiers of the warring factions often looted the grains of the peasants.<sup>43</sup> Even the Kashmiri village was not self-sufficient as it had to depend on various imported items for its survival. But the difficult trade routes led to the creation of a new class in villages who fulfilled all the requirements of the common peasantry. This new class was called as Damara who mostly acquired wealth by trade. It created conditions of feudalism as all the wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few Damaras who acted as feudal lords and owned most of the land in Kashmir. Regarding the ownership rights, D.D.Kosambi writes that "Land was effectively in private ownership to a considerable extent, and that surplus could be traded either against imported goods, or held over for internal trade in times of famine, to increase accumulation of wealth."<sup>44</sup>

The most oppressive measure which created a subjected peasantry in Kashmir was the system of *Begar* or forced labour. According to Irfan Habib, "The imposition of forced labour on certain sections of the rural population was an old established practice."<sup>45</sup> Kalhana attributed the introduction of *Begar* to Samkaravarman as he mentions that "He introduced that well known (system of forced) carriage of loads which is the harbinger of misery for the villages, and which is of 13 kinds."<sup>46</sup> Absence of proper roads and laboring class was detrimental for the cultivators as all the load of carrying their produce fell on them. This led to decrease in agricultural productions as peasants had to be away from the fields for long duration.

The deplorable condition of the peasantry improved to a certain extent with the establishment of Sultanate in Kashmir. The Sultans took measures to lessen the oppression committed on the common people including peasantry by their predecessors. Appreciating the welfare measures of Sultan Shamsuddin of Kashmir and his concern for the peasantry, Nizamuddin Ahmed remarks, "When Sultan Shamsuddin attained to sovereignty, he discontinued all the customs of oppressions and tyranny, which had continued from preceding ruler. He gave a written assurance to the *rai-yats* that he would not take from them a larger revenue than the sixth part of the produce."<sup>47</sup> But, still, the peasantry of Kashmir was living under the burden of heavy taxation and other oppressive measures of the Sultans which was mainly the result of the civil wars. The Shah Mir rulers were also not able to put an end to the hated *begar* which had a detrimental effect on the peasants of Kashmir. Infact, it was extended to the Hanjis in the times of Shihabuddin (1354-73) under whom they were asked to work wage free for the ruler for 7 days in a month. Later, forced labour was even extended in the Saffron fields where

peasants were forcibly employed to separate Saffron from the petals. In return, they were paid a certain quantity of salt as wages.

Apart from these oppressive measures, certain other measures were taken by the Sultans of Kashmir to develop agriculture and improve the conditions of the peasantry. Reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin is taken to be as one of the golden times for the peasants of Kashmir. He introduced a number of measures to augment agricultural productions. He reclaimed barren lands and cultivated crops on those lands where it was not possible earlier. Increase in cultivated land led to the abundance of agrarian produce which was stored in large granaries and later distributed among the common people. According to Srivara, "Everywhere were seen houses high as hill, full of rice lately grown on extensive fields. These granaries were indeed like the breast of the earth from which the people drained their nourishment and throne day by day. Like Samuyya, the King grew crops in places where lands could be obtained with difficulty, or where they seldom yielded crops before an account of calamities."<sup>48</sup> This clearly exhibits the commitment of Zain-ul-Abidin towards the welfare of the peasantry of Kashmir. In his conversation with his son, Zain-ul-Abidin had himself talked about his inclinations and his love for his subjects. According to him, "I have, owing to my love for my subjects, increased all the new productions of the country three folds by means of canals, cultivation and by other means."<sup>49</sup>

Zain-ul-Abidin increased the agricultural productions manifold by developing a sound irrigation system in the form of building canals, dams, tanks etc. These canals reclaimed the barren lands and in turn created favourable conditions for the peasantry to sow seeds without depending on rains as "the land was previous dependent on the rain (for its crops), but the king made it dependent on the river."<sup>50</sup> Describing the construction of various canals by Zain-ul-Abidin and their extension to the numerous fields, Jonaraja writes, "King obtained wonderful fame by joining a waterfall to a stream, and the river which had been dry became filled with water. The king caused the canal, which ran along the field to be extended to the lands at Utpalapura and he thus made both the canal and the lands useful. He caused a canal to be carried down to the desert of Nandashaila and thus made the people think of the Chakradhara in the midst of the sea. This beneficent king held high his unsullied fame and made the country of Karala a theme of praise by means of a canal...The king, whose history is pleasant, caused a canal to be constructed in the lands of Avantipura and the canal was rich in Shali crop."<sup>51</sup>

He provided all basic provisions to the peasantry so that they could cultivate their land and produce a surplus required for the nourishment of all the classes of people. As far as the land is concerned, it was divided mainly into four kinds. Giving details of the different kinds of land in Kashmir, Mirza Haider Dughlat writes, "In this region, all the land is divided into 4 kinds- The cultivation is : (1) by irrigation (abi), (2) on land not needing artificial irrigation, (3) gardens, and (4) level ground, where the river banks abound in violets and many coloured flowers."<sup>52</sup> He further adds that "on the level (ground), on account of the excessive moisture, the crops do not thrive, and for this reason the soil is not laboured, which constitutes one of its charms."<sup>53</sup> This shows that the conditions were not favourable for the peasants but, still, they worked hard for their bare survival and came out in flourishing colours as can be judged from the prosperity of the

times of Zain-ul-Abidin. Peasants were given full state support in his times and various measures were adopted so that the good of the peasantry should prevail. Appreciating the concerns of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin towards the peasants of Kashmir, N.K.Zutshi, a modern historian, writes, "The sultan anxiously looked after them in times of distress and comforted them."<sup>54</sup> He even compelled the thieves to follow the right path and work on land providing them with all the necessities required. According to Srivara, "The king caused the fleet of the Chandala thieves, who ought to have lived by agriculture, to be chained, and he compelled them to work on land. Knowing that low caste men take themselves to thieving when in want of means of livelihood, the king gave them provisions."<sup>55</sup>

Floods and famines were recurrent phenomena in Kashmir and whenever they occurred, they brought with them huge devastation for the peasantry of Kashmir. Srivara describes one such famine caused by the falling of the untimely snow which damaged the crops of Kashmir which were in full bloom. According to him, "Fate augments the happiness of men by increasing the crops and fate also brings calamity to them in the shape of famine. The clouds that make the grass grow by rains also destroy it by the weight of snow. The country was rich in crops, which in the year 31, in the month of chaitra, the sky suddenly rained dust. The country was beautified with the shali rice, when snow fell in the month of Agrahayena and caused distress. The earth covered her face with snow as with a white mantle, as if unable to bear the sight of the people's distress. The ripe shali crop which had gladdened the hearts of men was covered with snow...the monster famine soon stamped its mark on the country; there were emaciated men distressed for want of food, oppressed with hunger, and with eyes inflamed."<sup>56</sup>

Such conditions led to the starvation of the people who were longing for food and their hunger multiplied due to the destruction of crops and the rise in prices of paddy which increased manifold. Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin could not see the distress of the people and fed them with the rice stored in the state granaries free of cost till the new crops grew in plenty. He even cancelled the loan deeds between the debtors and creditors so as to provide relief to the distressed peasantry. According to Srivara, "Being a kind disposition, the king became anxious for his people, and after he had fed his distressed subjects for a few months, like his children, which his own rice, a plentiful crop grew, as if on account of the greatness of his heart. Out of humanity he cancelled the deeds on bhurja leaves drawn up between the creditors and debtors."<sup>57</sup>

Peasants under the Sultanate of Kashmir received better attention of the state than the Damara period. Since Zain-ul-Abidin reestablished tradition of *Rajatarangini* selecting Jonaraja and Srivara for the same, Peasant received attention of these Sanskrit historians. Zain-ul-Abidin has been projected by these chroniclers as the well wisher of the peasants and artisans. His policy of promotion of agriculture has been recorded by them into 4 points:

1. Rationalizing taxation policy
2. Digging of canals
3. Assignment of land in charity
4. Preference to cash crops particularly Saffron

Zain-ul-Abidin proved to be a harbinger of relief for the peasants who also worked earnestly for the welfare of the state as a whole. While formulating the state policy, Zain-ul-Abidin always had peasantry in mind as he felt that the prosperity of the land is mainly due to the hard work of the peasantry who cultivate land and produce surplus for the consumption of the state. He reduced revenue to  $\frac{1}{4}$  or even  $\frac{1}{7}$  of the produce so that the cultivating class did not have to live on bare survival. Giving details of the amount of revenue collected during the times of Zain-ul-Abidin and his advice to the future kings to work on same lines, Srivara writes, "At Svayyapura the king had caused an edict to be inscribed on a copper plate to the effect that at this shrine of Jainagiri, future kings should take one-seventh of the crop that grows as tribute. It ran thus -: Shri Jainallavadina bids future kings to take one-seventh of the produce of the land which he by his money has cleared and brought under cultivation at Jainagiri."<sup>58</sup> Even the sale and purchase deeds of the times of Zain-ul-Abidin reflect the proprietary rights of the tiller and the peasantry had every right to sell his land to anyone he liked. Such a relation which existed between the ruler and the peasantry was not seen in the later part of the Sultanate period as the Sultans were only interested in grabbing the throne and creating conditions of civil wars which had a detrimental effect on the common people as well as the peasantry.

With the establishment of Mughal rule in Kashmir in 1586, there ushered a new phase of economic development. The conquests of the Mughal emperors were the sources of the foundation of a big empire. But at the same time, they cared for the good governance of the people of the conquered areas and provided them a congenial environment for their overall development. Enumerating the benevolent policy of Akbar towards his subjects and his concept of sovereignty, Abul Fazl writes, "The whole energies of the Shahinshah are devoted to the soothment of mankind, a scrutiny and justice increase daily. As he considers that sovereignty means guardianship, he makes no distinction between pain and pleasure. He regards additions to dominion as a means of devotion to God, and sovereignty as the companion of service. With this view he appointed truthful and wise men, in every province that they might duly apportion chastisement and benevolence, and not, from greed, or timidity, fail to do what was proper."<sup>59</sup>

Akbar initiated a policy of socio-economic development in Kashmir after its annexation into the Mughal empire leading to the prosperity of the land and the people. Mughals took keen interest in the welfare of the people of Kashmir and treated peasants as the basis of the strength of a region. On the eve of Mughal occupation of Kashmir, agriculture was in a deteriorating condition due to the prolonged warfare. Akbar not only provided political stability to Kashmir, but he also promoted the agricultural and horticultural productions of Kashmir. Promotion of agriculture led to the betterment of the conditions of the peasants of Kashmir. Abul Fazl mentions about the relief provided to the peasants with the remission of some taxes by Akbar. According to him, "The cesses *Baj* and *Tamgha* were altogether remitted by His Majesty, which produced a reduction of 67,842  $\frac{1}{2}$  *Kharwars*<sup>60</sup> equivalent to 898,400 *dams*. For the additional relief of the husbandman, five *dams* on the price of a *Kharwar* were thrown in."<sup>61</sup> Akbar reorganized the administration of Kashmir so that the burden of the land revenue was not too great on the peasantry. He sent Qazi Nurullah and Qazi Ali for the revenue settlement of Kashmir. Prior to them, Akbar had sent some officials to enquire about the revenue

conditions of the valley. According to Abul Fazl, "He sent Sheikh Faizi, Mir Sharif Amuli, Khwaja Muhammed Hussain to scrutinize the Maraj while Khwaja Khafi were sent to examine the Kamraj."<sup>62</sup> These investigators reported to Akbar about the embezzlement of revenue and that the final assessment was not fixed upon actual facts.

Akbar considered the increase of revenue as disastrous for the cultivators which would bring destruction on them. According to Abul Fazl, "the far seeing glance (of Akbar) perceived that an increase in the assessment even though it did not exceed a duly calculated amount, would bring destruction on the cultivators, especially in a newly conquered country."<sup>63</sup> Thus Akbar sent Qazi Nurullah and Qazi Ali to investigate the matter. They divided the Sarkar of Kashmir into 42 Mahals. They assessed each village of the Sarkar and the total demand was fixed at 30,63,050 lakh *Kharwars* and 11 *Taraks* out of which 901,663 *Kharwars* and 8 *Taraks* were to be paid in cash. Giving details about the revenue assessment, Abul Fazl writes, "According to the assessment of Qazi Ali the revenue was fixed at 30 lakhs, 63050 *Kharwars*, 11 *Taraks*... Taking the prices current for several years, the Qazi struck an average of the aggregate, and the *Kharwar* (in kind) was ascertained to be 29 *dams*, and the *Kharwar* in money was fixed according to the former rate of 13  $\frac{8}{25}$  *dams*. The revenue, therefore, amounted to 7 *Kror*, 20 lakhs, 22,183 *dams*."<sup>64</sup> Akbar brought Raja Todarmal to Kashmir on his second visit who measured the whole land and settled the revenue.<sup>65</sup> During his visit, Akbar made Kashmir a crown land and included saffron, silkworm and the raising of cattle in the *Khalisa*.<sup>66</sup> On his third visit, Akbar abolished some miscellaneous taxes which brought great comfort to the peasants of Kashmir who were paying them for a long time. According to Abul Fazl, "At this time some attention was paid to miscellaneous imposts. 55 censurable customs were abolished. The husbandmen for a longtime paid these and until the order of remission took effect they did not believe in it (the abolition)."<sup>67</sup>

It is pertinent to mention here that the Mughal emperors from Akbar onwards made a policy of visiting Kashmir to inspect the situation personally. The presence of Mughal emperors in the valley naturally prevented any abuse of power as they personally looked into the affairs of the people and redressed their grievances. Mughal emperors ensured that the people should feel the Mughal rule through the socio-economic measures of the emperor. They introduced annual and periodic checks and auditing so that the acts of cheating and dishonesty were to be eliminated.<sup>68</sup> The Mughal governors were instructed to respect the local sentiments of the people and some of them were dismissed if their misdoings came to the notice of the emperor. Jahangir has himself recorded in his *Memoirs* that "As some (evil) things had been heard about Safdar Khan, governor of Kashmir, I dismissed him from the government and favouring Ahmed Beg Khan on account of his previous service, I promoted him to be the *Subehdar* of Kashmir."<sup>69</sup> All these things point to the fact that the concern for the common people was one of the main motives of the Mughal emperors. It is even corroborated by Abul Fazl who writes that Akbar "made the peasantry and the soldiery joyful"<sup>70</sup> which reflects the policy of the Mughal emperors towards the cultivating class.

Mughal emperor Jahangir, who treated Kashmir as his most favorite region, studied the socio-economic conditions of the people of Kashmir so that he could administer according to the needs and requirements of the people. He devoted a huge

space of his *Memoirs* to the people, water-resources, arts and crafts, flora and fauna and made them as important themes of his *Memoirs*. He also observed the food habits, dress and crops of Kashmir very minutely. The concern of Jahangir towards the betterment of the people of Kashmir can be gauged from the fact that he gave an order to the effect that number of the people accompanying the emperor should be reduced so that the comfort of the people of Kashmir should not be sidelined. It came to the notice of the emperor that the arrival of his retinue in Kashmir always increased the prices of the basic necessities of the people like vegetable, grains etc. and hampered the prosperous conditions of the peasantry who did not produce enough to serve the large forces of the Mughals. According to Jahangir, "As the area of Kashmir is not such that its produce may suffice for the expenses of the force that is always on service with the servants of the army of prosperity, and as, in consequence of the report (of the approach) of the glorious and victorious standards, the price of grains and vegetables had risen very high, an order was given for the public, that those servants who were in attendance on the royal stirrup should arrange their retinues, and only taking with them those who were indispensable, should send the remainder to their *jagirs*, and in the same way should take every precaution to reduce as far as possible the number of their beasts and followers."<sup>71</sup> Jahangir even abolished some of the most hated exactions like *Rasum-i-Faujdar* which had long caused misery to the peasantry of Kashmir.

Irfan Habib has postulated that any study of the peasants should incorporate the relation of the peasants with the exploiting class and also how they pay rent or surrender their surplus. According to him, "Any study of the peasants must involve an enquiry into how they pay rent or surrender their surplus. This necessitates the shifting of the focus, from time to time, from the exploited to the exploiters...But without seeing the peasants in their actual relation with the exploiting classes there can be no peasant history; the relationship is crucial."<sup>72</sup> As far as the peasant history of Kashmir is concerned, peasants of Kashmir represented a self-sufficient village procuring basic requirements from within the village. They coexisted with other social groups of the village like carpenters, weavers, potters, blacksmiths, cobblers etc. who rendered necessary services to the peasants in the form of manufacture and repair of their agricultural tools and supplements.<sup>73</sup> But the peasants predominated other social groups in a village and contributed to its development. The peasantry which comprised both Hindus and Muslims<sup>74</sup> were generally categorized into 3 main divisions. According to Mushtaq A. Kaw, "Larger group was that of the petty producers who were comparatively self-sufficient in as much as they did not hire out or hire in labour and just lived about their subsistence level. Another group was composed of the owners of large holdings who hired labour to the modern extent. Village Muqaddam and patwari belonged to this group. Third group consisted of the large scale producers who entirely depended upon village labour. Zamindars, Qanungos and Chaudhuris belonged to this group."<sup>75</sup>

Even the size of land holdings differed from peasant to peasant keeping in view their carrying capacity with respect to the cultivation of the land. The availability of land and the rights of peasants over it brings us to the crucial question of the ownership rights of the peasants on the land. According to Mushtaq Kaw, "the apparent legal and fiscal limitations together with some practical difficulties reduced a peasant more to the position of a limited rather than absolute owner of the land in Kashmir."<sup>76</sup> The argument

of the European travellers that the land in India belonged to the King was also applied in the context of Kashmir. Most of the European travelers who visited Kashmir have remarked that the land belonged to the king in Kashmir. William Moorcroft has commented that "the whole of the land in Kashmir is considered to have been, time out of mind, the property of the ruler."<sup>77</sup> Kalhana, the most revered historian of Kashmir, has not commented on the ownership rights of the peasants. It was generally believed that land belonged to the ruler and with the passage of time, the private ownership of land started due to the alienation of land by way of sale, making gifts, in lieu of salaries etc. The private ownership of land resulted in the cultivating rights also. The ownership and cultivating rights had no meaning if the peasant did not had the possession rights. The right of possession meant the enjoyment of fruits of the land which the peasants had grown with his hard earned labour. Most of the produce was taken by the officials of the state in the name of revenue and peasants were left with minimum bare sustenance. Thus it was the state who was the real owner of the land as it enjoyed most of the benefits of the peasant's hard work and labour.<sup>78</sup>

Kashmir was a land of abundant water supply and fertile soil. "In Kashmir", writes Jahangir, "there is plenty of water from streams and springs"<sup>79</sup> which could be channelized into the fields for its utilization in agriculture. Commenting on this utilization of water in the fields which led to good cultivation, Moorcroft writes, "The abundant supply of water from snow and rain is collected into numerous streams and lakes, the overflowing of which, with the evaporation from them, preserve both soil and atmosphere in a humid condition, more propitious to vegetation than to animal life."<sup>80</sup> Certainly, it led to good cultivation and various crops could be grown in such conditions. Writing further about the richness in vegetation in Kashmir, Moorcroft remarks that "The chief peculiarity by which Kashmir is distinguished from the mountain countries on its confines is the richness of its vegetation. The mountains, although for a considerable part of the year capped in many parts with snow, are coated with rich forests, and at their bases is a productive alluvial soil abounding with verdure, or, where cultivated, with plentiful harvests, especially of rice."<sup>81</sup>

Rice was the main crop cultivated in Kashmir and was also the staple diet of the people.<sup>82</sup> According to Jahangir, "Rice is the principal crop. Probably there are three parts under rice and one under all other grains. The chief food of the people of Kashmir is rice, but it is inferior. They boil it fresh and allow it to get cold, and then eat it and call it *batha*. It is not usual to take their food warm, but people of small means keep a portion of the *batha* for a night and eat it next day."<sup>83</sup> Writing further about the food habits of the people of Kashmir mainly living in villages, Jahangir comments that "they boil vegetables in water, and throw in a little salt in order to alter the flavour, and then eat them along with the *batha*. Those who want to have something tasty put a little walnut oil into the vegetables. Walnut oil soon becomes bitter and evil flavoured. They also use cow oil (*raughan* i.e *ghi*) but this is taken fresh from newly made butter (*maska*). They throw this into the food and call it *soda pak* in the Kashmiri language. The wheat is small and of little substance (*Kammaghz*). It is not the custom to eat bread (*nan*)."<sup>84</sup>

Abul Fazl also gives details of the food of the people of Kashmir which mainly includes rice, wheat, fish, vegetables etc. According to him, "The food of the people is

chiefly rice, wine, fish and various vegetables, and the last mentioned they dry and preserve. Rice is cooked and kept over night to be eaten. Though shali rice is plentiful, the finest quality is not obtainable. Wheat is small in grain and black in colour, and there is little of it, and little consumed. Gram (chick pea) and barley are nowhere found.”<sup>85</sup> Abul Fazl estimates rice of Kashmir sufficient for the consumption of its people. He also identifies lesser produced crops which show that Mughals were concerned with the agricultural productions of Kashmir in accordance with peasants and soil stability.

Irfan Habib postulates that the peasants, generally, could retain only the coarsest variety of their produce for their family and the Kashmiri peasant was no different. Kashmiri people would often cook their food in water and oil or *ghi* were considered luxuries. According to him, “But generally speaking, it was the coarsest varieties of his produce which the peasant was able to retain for his own family. We know that in Kashmir the rice eaten by the ordinary people was very coarse...In Kashmir too, the common people cooked their food in water, and walnut oil and *ghi* were regarded as delicacies.”<sup>86</sup>

As far as the clothing of the peasantry was concerned, both men and women wore woolen clothes keeping in view the cold climate of Kashmir. They generally wore a single woolen garment called *pattu* and kept it unwashed for 3 to 4 years till the time it looked like a rag.<sup>87</sup> Jahangir has also commented that the people of Kashmir wore *pattu* which was kept unwashed for many years. According to him, “The woolen clothes are well known. Men and women wear a woolen tunic (*kurta*) and call it *pattu*. If they donot put an tunic, they believe that it is impossible to digest their food without it...the common women do not wear clean and washed clothes. They use a tunic of *pattu* for three or four years, they bring it unwashed from the house of the weaver, and sew it into a tunic and it does not reach the water till it falls to pieces. It is considered wrong to wear drawers (*izar*); they wear the tunic long and ample as far as the head and falling down to the feet and they also wear a belt.”<sup>88</sup>

Besides the land, the material possessions of the peasants included a wooden pestle, mortar, few earthen vessels and some earthen jars which were mainly used for storing grains.<sup>89</sup> The peasantry of Kashmir mainly lived in mud walled and thatched roofed houses which were usually four storied. According to Abul Fazl, “The houses are all of wood and are of four stories and some of more, but it is not the custom to enclose them. Tulips are grown on the roofs which present a lovely sight in the spring time. Cattle and sundry stores are kept in the lower storey, the second contains the family apartments, and in the third and the fourth are the household chattels.”<sup>90</sup> Generally, the houses of the peasantry were devoid of basic requirements like chimneys, ventilation etc. which led them to live in indigent conditions.

Mughals were very much concerned with the well being of the peasantry and contributed to the development of agriculture as is reflected in an order issued in the reign of Shahjahan. According to Inayat Khan, “In these days, an order went forth from the beneficent presence of the effect that an additional sum of 50,000 rupees from the Kashmir treasury should be disbursed in charity among the destitute inhabitants of that province, as a stimulus to agriculture.”<sup>91</sup> It led to increase in the quantum of cultivation and Kashmir abounded in vegetation. Giving details of full bloom in vegetation, Inayat

Khan further writes, "At this time, with the exception of the almond, which owing to its budding earlier than all the other trees had already shed its flowers, every other species of vegetation in the valley was seen in magnificent full bloom."<sup>92</sup>

The general prosperity of the peasants was dependent on the increase in cultivation as all their material glory relied on it. More the surplus, more is the prosperity of the peasants. The economic conditions of the peasantry improved a lot due to the measures taken by the Mughal emperors for increase in agricultural productions. Mughals took full advantage of the favourable climatic conditions by not only introducing some new varieties but also improved the existing ones. Mughal emperors paid much attention to the cultivation of fruits and in the reign of Akbar, various new varieties of fruits were introduced. Mohammed Quli Khan, who was the inspector of gardens in Kashmir, introduced *Shahalu* or cherries from Kabul into Kashmir through grafting technique and increased its production.<sup>93</sup> According to Irfan Habib, "The technique of grafting aroused aristocratic interests, and its application led to an improvement in the quality of citrus fruits and to the introduction of sweet cherry in Kashmir."<sup>94</sup> Being a naturalist, Jahangir noticed the fruits of Kashmir very minutely. He gives ample space to the Kashmiri fruits in his *Memoirs* and has vividly described most of them for example apricot, pears, apples, guavas, pomegranates, melons etc.

Even the Mughal officials in Kashmir were instructed by the Mughal emperors to improve the fruit cultivation. Zafar Khan, the Mughal governor of Kashmir in the reign of Shahjahan, improved the quality of cherries, plums and grapes by using new grafting techniques. All these measures created happy conditions for the peasantry and some of the Mughal governors were even rewarded for improving the conditions of the peasantry. According to Inayat Khan, "In as much as His Majesty had readily perceived the happy condition of the peasantry and inhabitants of that region under my father's (Zafar Khan) administration, he graciously bestowed one lakh of rupees on him out of the funds which were due to the royal estates and raised his *mansab*, by an increase of 1000 *suwar*, to 3000 *zat* and a little number of *suwar*."<sup>95</sup>

Mughals also brought a large area under the cultivation of Saffron and improved its production due to its enormous demand. Saffron production increased manifolds during Akbar's reign. According to Abul Fazl, "One of the occurrences was the increase of Saffron in Kashmir. Formerly each seed yielded less than three flowers and the amount received by government did not exceed 20,000 *traks* but was not less than 7000. Once in Mirza Haider's time, it was 28,000 *traks*. This year when it became *Khalsa*, the ruler's share was 90,000 *traks*. Though there was more land under cultivation, yet the flowers were also more than seed yielded upto eight flowers."<sup>96</sup>

The policy of the Mughal emperors towards the welfare of the people of Kashmir was also reflected in the works of the Mughal governors of Kashmir. Saif Khan was the Mughal governor of Kashmir in the reign of Aurangzeb. He introduced many new innovations which had a long lasting effect on the peasantry of Kashmir. He introduced measurement of land for the first time in place of the old practice of making an estimate based on mere conjectures.<sup>97</sup> Fazal Khan was also the Mughal governor of Kashmir of the reign of Aurangzeb. He is famous for remitting many taxes which had proved taxing on

the peasantry of Kashmir such as *Hasil-i-ghalak*, (tax on earthen jars), *Nimak* (salt duty) etc.<sup>98</sup>

There were also some Mughal governors who indulged in anti-peasant activities and levied many taxes on commodities which hardened the life and conditions of the peasantry of the valley. Itqad Khan was one such governor who was the last governor of the reign of Jahangir and even served in the first few years of the reign of Shahjahan. During his period the farmers of the villages around Pampore were forced to collect the saffron harvest without any payment of wages. The *begar* was levied for the collection of Saffron.<sup>99</sup> He even levied a surcharge of 4 *dams* on each *Kharwar* of rice collected in revenue. It was also customary for the villagers to give 2 fat sheep or 60 *dams* in cash to the local officials whose revenue exceeded 400 *Kharwars* of rice. He even changed the customary mode of collecting land revenue in kind and demanded its payment in cash that too at an enhanced rate. He appointed his own men to pick up the fruits and sell it at their own prices. It brought great distress to the owners of fruit orchard and they started cutting down the trees and preferred to keep the land uncultivated.<sup>100</sup> When Shahjahan came to know about the anti-peasant measures of the governor, he immediately removed him and appointed Zafar Khan as the new governor of Kashmir. Zafar Khan is remembered for the removal of hardships which his predecessor had inflicted on the peasantry of the valley. He removed all the evil practices which were imposed by Itqad Khan and on the orders of Shahjahan, he inscribed the abolition of these hated exactions on a stone and fixed it on the door of the Jama Masjid so that the general public would know about it.

As already stated before, Kashmir as a region experienced floods from ancient times onwards due to untimely and incessant rains and snowfall. It created situation of famine as the floods destroyed the standing crops of the region. The peasantry of Kashmir was the worst sufferer as its survival came under the question due to the damage caused to the standing crops, reduction of cropped areas, damages to the stored grains, fodder, livestock etc.<sup>101</sup> Reduction in supply of grains led to increase in the food prices which created a situation of inflation whose effects were also seen mostly on the peasants of Kashmir and the people at large. Mughal period also witnessed great floods and famines which are authenticated by the contemporary Mughal chronicles. They give ample information on the floods of Kashmir together with consequent situation of starvation. They also provide information on the relief measures introduced by the Mughal emperors in the form of providing food grains, cash grants etc. These were apparently short term measures and we have very less reference to any long term measures like building of embankments, canals etc. which could have channelized the flood waters.

On his third visit to Kashmir, Akbar found Kashmir under the grip of severe famine. Irfan Habib rightly observes, "In 1597, there was an acute scarcity from drought, where destitute people 'having no means of nourishing their children exposed them for sale in the public places of the city'."<sup>102</sup> As the welfare of the people was the main concern of the emperor, so he immediately plunged into relief measures. He ordered that the food grains were to be imported from Pakhli, Bhimbar and Western Punjab.<sup>103</sup> According to Abul Fazl, "By his orders 12 places were prepared in the city for the feeding of great and small (i.e young and old). Every Sunday a general proclamation was

made in Idgah and some went from the palace and bestowed food and presents on the applicants. Eighty thousand necessitous persons-more or less- received their heart's desires."<sup>104</sup> This shows that the Mughal emperor tried to realize the Kashmiris his concern with their life and conditions. Extending financial and nutritional support to the people of Kashmir at the time of famine, the Mughal emperor made a difference between the Pre-Mughal and the Mughal rule in terms of public welfare activities. Moreover, the Mughal emperors strengthened the concept of social security as a policy of the state.

The floods of 1642 created situation of scarcity of grains as most of the crops were destroyed in the rains. When Shahjahan came to know about the plight of the people of Kashmir, he immediately ordered to export grains from Sialkot, Jalandhar, Lahore, Kalanaur etc. so as to distribute them among the needy people.<sup>105</sup> Describing the relief measures of Shajahan for the famine stricken people, Inayat Khan writes, "An edict was moreover promulgated to the effect that 100 rupees worth of meals should be bestowed daily upon the poor and needy from 5 different places in Kashmir at His Majesty's private expense."<sup>106</sup> It was brought to the notice of Shahjahan that Tarbiyat Khan, the Mughal governor of Kashmir, was not able to manage the affairs of the state and the starving people were further languishing. He immediately deputed Zafar Khan as the new governor of Kashmir and some money was also entrusted to him to be given to the destitute inhabitants of the valley. According to Inayat Khan, "Unfortunately, the above mentioned Tarbiyat Khan was found incapable of managing the affairs of that famished population. Accordingly, His Majesty deputed in his stead Zafar Khan, who had formerly held the government of the country for some years and who by his excellent administration had always caused the natives to be contended and grateful towards him. Before leaving for Kashmir to assume charge, my father was loaded with royal favours; and moreover an additional sum of 20,000 rupees was entrusted in his case, to be dispensed among the destitute inhabitants of the kingdom."<sup>107</sup>

This clearly points to the welfare policy of the Mughal emperors who always kept the welfare of the people of Kashmir as their utmost concern and peasantry being the basic social unit of any society was being looked after very well. It is corroborated by Abdul Hamid Lahori in his *Padshahnama* who also points that the welfare of the people was the utmost concern of the emperor and money was distributed to the people in their times of distress. According to him, "It was stressed that the welfare of the people should be kept uppermost and a sum of 20000 rupees more was sent for the needy and decrepits of the place with him (Zafar Khan)."<sup>108</sup>

All these measures, even if short term, brought great relief to the common people in general and peasantry in particular and improvements could be seen in their life and conditions. Huge money was disbursed among the needy people from the royal treasury as charity and when it was felt that additional amount was needed in the agricultural sector to revert back the prosperity of the peasantry, the Mughal emperors did not step back. According to Inayat Khan, "Since it was learnt by the emperor from the *Arzdasht* of Zafar Khan, *Nazim Subah* Kashmir, that the condition of the beggars and the people at large of this region got improved with a sum of 1,50,000 rupees sent there from the treasury for charity (*Khanzanah-i-Khairat*) and the country had started inching towards prosperity but if 50,000 rupees more were for meeting the perquisites of agriculture to

unprovided with means cultivators the prosperity of the country would revert back to its previous condition. A yarleigh of was issued that an additional sum should be assigned to that Suba as *Khairat*.<sup>109</sup>

Large scale devastation caused to the peasantry of Kashmir at the time of floods and famines brings out an important question of the collection of land revenue in these times of distress. The economic condition of the peasantry was not such that they could afford to pay the land revenue and it was also realized by the Mughal emperors who often remitted the land revenue to be paid to the state. According to Irfan Habib, "When a famine occurred in Kashmir in 1642, it was ordered that the assessment on the peasants be reduced."<sup>110</sup> Land revenue was also remitted during the reign of Aurangzeb when Fazal Khan was the Mughal governor. It is said that Fazal Khan often remitted the land revenue whenever a natural calamity hit the kingdom of Kashmir.<sup>111</sup>

Irfan Habib attributed a situation of agrarian crisis in the 17<sup>th</sup> century North India which was mainly characterized by official oppression, migration of rural people and severe decline in rural population which further affected the extent of arable land, agricultural produce and the collection of land revenue. The situation was further aggravated by the famines which "initiated wholesale movement of population"<sup>112</sup> Same phenomenon was witnessed in Kashmir in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but of a less magnitude. Mughals were keenly involved in the administration of the kingdom of Kashmir and looked after the common people with utmost gratification and concern. Some of the orders issued by Akbar show his concern for the general people of Kashmir. According to Abul Fazl, "An order was given that the troops should not be quartered in the house of the inhabitants."<sup>113</sup> Akbar even announced that the soldiers should not incur any losses in the cultivators and they were forbidden from entering their fields. Similar policy was followed by the succeeding Mughal emperors towards the peasantry of Kashmir but there were certain factors that created a situation of agrarian crisis in Kashmir. Official oppression of the peasantry and the subsequent demand of miscellaneous taxes and high revenue demand led to the subjection of peasantry. There were various instances of mal treatment of the peasantry at the hands of the *Subahdars* of Kashmir such as Itqad Khan, Muzaffar Khan, Afrasiyab Khan etc. Whenever the Mughal emperors came to know about these evil practices of the governors, they immediately revoked all their measures but till then all the damage had been done and the peasantry had to face the brunt of these officials.

*Begar* was also one of the reason for the deepening of the agrarian crisis in Kashmir. Peasant of Kashmir was resorted to forced labour as there was less labour force which had detrimental effect on their agricultural produce as they had to lease their fields and neglect their work and instead do forced labour. Mughals introduced many measures to abolish this hated system as can be seen in the reign of Akbar and Shahjahan but still some of its attributes could be seen in the society especially among the saffron cultivators.<sup>114</sup>

Forced migration of the peasantry of Kashmir, even on a small scale, was the consequence of the recurring floods and famines which retarded the life of the peasantry. Damage to crops and the subsequent starvation of the people created conditions of migration and exodus of people to their neighbouring areas. According to Inayat Khan.

“This year (1642) a severe famine fell upon the territory of Kashmir, so that a vast number of the poor and indigent of the region were forced to emigrate and come with their wives and families to the capital of Lahore, where they proceeded to supplicate beneath the royal balcony.”<sup>115</sup> This forced exodus led to decrease in agricultural produce and the subsequent rise in prices. Abul Fazl also corroborates that the conditions of famine led to the migration of the peasantry which created a situation of inflation or rise in prices of the basic necessities of life. According to him, “On account of the deficiency of rain and the dispersal of the husbandmen, prices became somewhat high.”<sup>116</sup> Mass exodus of the peasantry continued even in the time of Sikh and Dogra rulers as and they sought their livelihood in the neighbouring plains. According to Farooq Fayaz, a modern historian, “The natural disasters coupled with the callous role of the Sikh and Dogra bureaucracy not only deprived the people of their meagre possessions but also led to the mass exodus of Kashmiri peasantry to seek their sources of livelihood in the plains of Hindustan.”<sup>117</sup>

The conditions of the peasantry further deteriorated with the establishment of Afghan and Sikh rule in Kashmir. The atrocities committed by the Afghan and the Sikh governors and their deputies in Kashmir further aggravated the economic scenario of Kashmir. Describing the deplorable conditions of the peasantry in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century, Walter Lawrence writes, “It was no wonder that cultivation was bad, and that the revenue was not paid, and that the peasants were roving from one village to another in the hope of finding some rest and freedom from oppression.”<sup>118</sup> The new system of appointing deputies on behalf of the governors to rule the province of Kashmir from the times of the later Mughals further created situation of chaos and anarchy as they ignored their duties and concentrated on their personal gains. These deputies unleashed reign of terror and started exacting cruel exactions from the people. Walter Lawrence has attributed the reign of deputies as one of the main factors for the diminishing of land revenue and the misery of the peasants. According to him, “The peasants, one and all, attributed their miseries to the deputies through whom the Maharajas ruled and they have always recognized that their rulers were sympathetic and anxious to secure their prosperity. But the officials of Kashmir would never allow their master to know the real condition of the people, or to find out that the revenue of the country was diminishing.”<sup>119</sup>

Further commenting on the general condition of the peasantry of Kashmir in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century, Walter Lawrence writes, “Much has been written of the abuses which have prevailed in the administration of Kashmir. They were numerous and deplorable, and when I first came to Kashmir in 1889, I found the people sullen, desperate and suspicious. They had been taught for many years that they were serfs without any rights but with many disabilities. They were called *Zulm-parast*, or worshippers of tyranny, and every facility was afforded to their cult. They were forced by soldiers to plough and sow, and the same soldiers attended at harvest time. They were dragged away from their houses to carry loads to Gilgit, and every official had a right to their labour and their property.”<sup>120</sup> This clearly proves that the situation of the peasantry was not a happy one in the later part of the Mughal rule and beyond. The continuous exploitation of the peasants in the form of high revenue demand, introduction of unjust new imports, system of *begar* etc. subjected the peasantry to its lowest levels.

William Moorcroft, an English traveller who came to Kashmir in early 19<sup>th</sup> century, considered the peasantry of Kashmir of his times "in a condition of extreme wretchedness."<sup>121</sup> He remarked that the appearance of the peasantry of Kashmir was in sharp contrast to the beauty of the valley. Describing the wretched and miserable living standards of the peasantry, Moorcroft writes, "The beauty of the scenery, however, ill harmonised with the appearance of the peasantry. Their huts were inferior in comfort to an English cow-house, and their clothes were insufficient to defend them from the cold of the season. Not one-twentieth part of the arable land was in cultivation, and a number of half choked canals attested once careful, and now neglected irrigation...Maha Singh and his Sikhs seemed to be practising the usual system of violence and extortion, as far as we might judge from the clamorous remonstrances of the villagers."<sup>122</sup>

Sir Jadunath Sarkar has shown a scary picture of the peasantry of Kashmir who lived in abject poverty, dirt, ignorance and roamed naked due to lack of clothing. According to him. "The common people of Kashmir were sunk in the deepest ignorance and poverty; many of the villagers lived in primitive simplicity and went about almost naked for want of clothing; they merely wrapped a blanket round their bodies for warmth. Long distances and lack of roads made it impossible to import grain from outside, and every valley had to be self contained in the matter of its food supply; and when a natural calamity like flood or heavy snowfall cut the communications, the inhabitants perished helplessly of famine in thousands. The province was off the routes of the civilized world, difficulty of transport raised the cost of marketing its produce...The villagers were half naked boors, living in abject poverty, ignorance, and filth."<sup>123</sup>

This above image of the Kashmiri peasantry as shown by Sir Jadunath Sarkar is an exaggeration of the historical facts and seems to be based on conjectures and hearsay. The contemporary and modern works do not substantiate his claims that the peasantry lived naked and wore nothing except a blanket. It has been already discussed that the Kashmiri people wore woolen clothes called *pattu*. The cold climate of Kashmir could not allow the people to remain naked. The terrain of Kashmir did not support an efficient transport system but it does not mean that it was impossible to import grains. Whenever a famine occurred, the Mughal emperors imported grains from the neighbouring areas so as to support the people of Kashmir.

Mughal emperors always portrayed state as a promoter of the inclusive policy. They tried to remove the miseries of the common people which led to the fortification of the social base of the Mughal rule in Kashmir. It is evident that the agricultural productions remained uninterrupted in Kashmir from the period of the establishment of the Mughal rule in Kashmir till the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is corroborated by the trade of the agricultural productions of Kashmir with other regions of the Mughal empire. Mughals made them available through the process of inter-regional trade. There was huge demand for the agrarian products of Kashmir like Saffron, fresh and dry fruits, vegetables, grains etc. The regular visits of the Mughal emperors to Kashmir also helped in the trade of the Kashmiri products. They were mostly accompanied by numerous traders from Delhi and Agra who purchased these products and sold them in the chief cities of India. Kashmiri Saffron was one of the most costly items which were in great

demand in the Mughal empire. Despite the inhuman practices of *begar* among the Saffron cultivators, its production increased manifold in the Mughal period.

Similarly, the fruit and vegetable productions of Kashmir made it very much visible in various parts of the Mughal Empire. The special treatment meted out to the fruits of Kashmir by the contemporary Mughal sources further increased the prestige and popularity of Kashmir in the whole Mughal Empire. The Mughal emperors procured large supplies of fruits from Kashmir for its consumption in the royal palace and the rest of the supply was consumed by the chief cities of the empire. A large quantity of Kashmiri vegetables, grains and other eatables were exported to the various parts of the empire. They were even sent directly to the royal kitchen to be consumed by the royalty. According to Abul Fazl, "At the beginning of every quarter, the *Diwan-i-Buyutat* and the *Mir Bakawal*, collect whatever they think will be necessary; e.g. *Sukhdas* rice from Bharaj, *Dewzira* rice from Gwalior, *Jinjin* rice from Rajori and Nimlah, *ghi* from HisarFiruza; ducks, water fowls and certain vegetables from Kashmir."<sup>124</sup> The availability of Kashmiri grains in the royal kitchen can be ascertained by a narrative given by Jahangir. According to him, "On the arrival of Prince Parwiz to the court after a long time, I gave away as means of livelihood, to *faqirs* and deserving people 44786 *bighas* of land and two entire villages, with 320 ass loads (Kharwar, a weight) of grain from Kashmir and 7 ploughs of land in Kabul."<sup>125</sup>

The agricultural productions of Kashmir highlighted the role of the peasantry in the socio-political and economic life of Kashmir very much. It is important to mention that under the Mughals the presence of Kashmiri products in the markets of the Mughal Empire became an important factor in terms of strengthening the Mughal impact on the economic life of the region. It not only intensified the process of cultural ties between Kashmir and other parts of the Mughal Empire but more importantly, the Mughals were encouraged to work for the betterment of the Kashmiri peasants. The continuous trade of the agrarian products of Kashmir with the various regions of the Mughal Empire reflects a satisfactory condition of the peasantry of Kashmir. The importance of the peasantry of Kashmir in the overall economic development of both Kashmir and the Mughal Empire was kept in mind by the Mughal emperors while initiating any policy measures. They also knew that the sound organization of agriculture was always dependent on the prosperity of the cultivating class. Thus, they created an environment in which the peasantry could expand their capabilities for the betterment of both the present and the future generations.

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