

# Expansion of Agriculture in Kashmir under Mughal Emperors

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**Abstract:** The period under review witnessed many developments in the economic field. It is appropriate here to deal with the main developments in agriculture, industry, Trade and commerce, conditions of workers, their professions, the volume of foreign trade, imports, skilled and minor crafts and the like to give a complete picture of the society in the Mughal Subah of Kashmir.

Land revenue remained main source of the income of the state exchequer throughout the Mughal period and as such main interest of the rulers revolved round agriculture. During the Sultanate period Zain-ul-Abidin geared up the administrative machinery to improve the agriculture operations, and to bring more and more land under plough. Large numbers of canals were dug out and the old one also repaired. In 1533 Mirza Haidar swept the kingdom with a normal contingent of 300 people and defeated army. In the subsequent years there was a constant interference in the affairs of country, which ultimately led to its fall and annexation. The constant warfare turned grain fields into barren land. The tenants abandoned their land. The Mughal annexation in the early years further deteriorated the peasantry. The economic exploitation at the hands of the newly introduced Jagirdars and the oppressive attitude of the occupant army almost ruined the peasantry and nullified the achievement of the Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin.

**Keywords:** Mughal Subah, plough, Sarkar, Naibs, Parganas, Jihat, Peshkar, Malia, Qanungo, Langar, Kashta and *uftada*.

## Introduction:

The collapse of the agricultural operations was not conducive to the policies of Akbar, as it had led to a couple of risings. Thus he initiated certain measures to streamline the collapsed system. These measures though taken have brought forth the desired results. Peace returned to the kingdom of Kashmir. Main focus was on the agriculture and the revenue officials were reprimanded time and again if found negligent while discharging their duties. Once there was safety, the tenants who had abandoned their homes, came out of their mountainous hideouts to re-settle in their respective villages. The land revenue reforms of Akbar coupled with the policy of pacification of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb resulted in the constant increase in population. The subsequently effected the agriculture operations. Pressure on the land was felt to the close of Jahangir's reign, which forced Shah Jahan to amend the policy of Madadi Maash assignments. Half of the grant was now assigned out of the barren land with a directive to bring the same under plough.

However, we fail to work out the actual average brought under plough in euclidian terms, because of the paucity of the statistical information. This difficulty also is felt so far the factual position of population is concerned, which could have helped us in determining the actual agriculture operation. The very concept of the census was not even conceived of secondly whatever information is recorded in the contemporary sources is highly exaggerated. A 19<sup>th</sup> century chronicler without quoting the sources states that the population of the Subah during the Jahangir reign was 19,43,033, nevertheless, there is an authentic record about the villages of the Subah right from the beginning of the Mughal rule down to its disintegration. This factor studied in the light of revenue figures gives an idea about the extent of agriculture. According to Naran Koul Ajiz, there were 5896 villages in the Subah. Muhammad Azam has supported this statement with a slight variation. But according to an accountancy manual of 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were 5352 villages all unmeasured, which is in accord with the census figures conducted in 1901. But some earlier sources have recorded highly exaggerated number of villages, existing in early medieval period. Such an inflated number of villages could not have existed despite the fertility of the land. Abul Fazl has mentioned that there was not a single piece of land which was not brought under plough. Three-fourth of the entire land of the Subah was mountainous, and the rest one-fourth was brought under plough and orchards, and as such there was extensive use of cultivable land.

On the basis of the revenue returns on the Ain, we can safely infer that the area lying in between Gugnagit to Ferozpora and Hirapura to Baramulla was mostly brought under plough. Abdul Hamid Lahori and Waris give us a detailed account of the pastoral area and the health resorts, in the valley. On the basis of this information, we can infer that more than three-fourth of the cultivable land in the Sarkar Kashmir was brought under cultivation and more and more *Uftada* and *Banjar* land appears to have been brought under cultivation of cereals, fruits and vegetables subsequently. But during the later Mughal period there was again chaos and confusion. The governors deputed their Naibs to Kashmir and the Jagirdars formed out their jagirs to the highest bidder, who in turn exacted their amount in the shortest possible period. The tenants very often abandoned their ancestral land because of the exploitation of Jagirdars and the revenue officials, and brought *uftada* land under cultivation, laying in jurisdiction of the Jagirdars.

### Crops and Method of production:

Hardly any substantial change has taken place in the cultivation since the Mughal period. The peasant's implements were the plough, with an iron plough share, a wooden mallet for clod breaking wooden spade with an iron tip, Kreele for carrying manures and a hoe. The crops were divided into two broad groups, the Rabi and Kharif. Barley wheat, rape, mustard, cotton, grams, beans, linseed, lentils were Rabi crops; rice, pulses, water chestnuts, maize, and saffron were the Kharif crops. Rice was the principal crop cultivated extensively throughout the valley, and its production was carried in Kashtiwari, Rajouri, Pakhil, and some areas of Poonch. There were so many varieties of rice existing during our period. More than sixty Lakh Kharwars of rice were produced approximately.

Rice of Rajouri was superior to that of Kashmir. Wheat production was extensive in Kashtiwari, Punch and other hilly regions. Shahabad pargana of Kashmir Sarkar was famous for its superior quality of wheat. But the grains of the wheat in the valley were smaller and inferior to the wheat cultivated in the plains. A little production of the wheat was carried in little Tibet but barley and grams were the main agricultural products. Barley was produced in Kashtiwari and Pakhil and introduced in Mughal period. Grams were not produced in the valley because of unfavorable soil and climate. Millets, buckwheat, and various kinds of pulses were produced in little and Greater Tibet.

Pulses of various varieties, amaranth, sesame, rape, linseed and flax were also cultivated in the Karewas of Kashmir. Tobacco cultivation appears to have been introduced in 18<sup>th</sup> century. Wild hemp grew on the river banks and ravines. Cotton cultivation was not so extensive. Motah and bean, maize and Kangni or shole were mainly cultivated around the banks of the rivers. China was raised in the Lar defile and around the Wular lake. Water chestnut was extensively found in the lakes. It constituted the main food of thousands of people around the lakes. Of all important cash crops saffron famous for its bouquet and medicinal properties, was extensively cultivated in Pampore and Inderkot. Under Mughals a large area was brought under cultivation of saffron. Qualitatively and quantitatively rich vegetables like beans, konl, khol, turnips, radish, spinach, carrot, pumpkins, white beans, cucumbers and onions were mainly produced.

### Means of irrigation:

The means of irrigation varied in different regions of the Subah. Enough hydra resources were available in the valley at the present, but scanty in the arid regions of Rajouri, Kashtiwari, Pakhil and Tibet Khurd wa Kalan. On account of varied topography and geophysical situation various methods of irrigation were adopted in the different parts of the Subah. Nevertheless the canal irrigation was almost common throughout the province. In spite of the natural barriers hampering the expansion of trade and commerce, the mountains were store houses of water. As a matter of fact the valley of Kashmir is a gift of the Himalayas. The Jehlum, and its tributaries in the valley, Kishan Ganga in Pakhil, the Shayok and the Indus and their tributaries in Ladakh and Baltistan, Chinab, Tohi, and a network of streams and rivulets provided water to the fields of the Subah. But the table land was mainly dependent on rains. The construction of canals had received a great impetus during the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin but the Mughals did not pay much attention towards the canal- building. However, some old canals were repaired and only a few new canals were built to irrigate the pleasure gardens rather than agricultural land. But care was taken not to spare the surrounding lands from the benefit of such irrigation work.

During the reign of Akbar, Yousuf Khan Rizvi built a canal connecting a stream known as Nullah Sindh with Baghi Ilahi. Under Jahangir, some old canals like Lachama Kul were repaired under the supervision of Malik Haidar, and Harvan canal was laid out for watering Nur Afza Bagh at the cost of 30,000 rupees. Under Shah Jahan, a Atamga grant farman to Asaf Khan laid down the conditions that watering to the gardens should not cause hardship to the tenants by reducing their irrigation facilities.

Another sources of irrigation in the valley consisted of the springs. Most of the interior land beneath the Karewas or the foothills was irrigated by the spring water. But the spring water was not considered suitable for irrigation on account of its properties. Vegetable gardens were watered from deep well, dug out in the vicinities of these orchards.

### Land Revenues:

Kashmir was annexed in 1586. Though for some time it remained a vital part of the province of Kabul, but very soon Kashmir assumed the status of a full-fledged province like other Mughal Indian province. It was, made into a separate *Subah* under Jahangir. Thenceforth, the *Subah* of the Kashmir was broadly divided, as earlier, into two major divisions termed *Maraz* and *Kamraz* in *Persian* accounts. For the sake of administrative convenience, the two parts were further subdivided into a considerable number of administrative unit's designated *Parganas*. Anyhow, *Parganas* varied in size as it discernible from striking contrast in their revenue returns, together with the distinct number of villages constituting each *Pargana* separately. The *Parganas* simply represented the total sum of villages distinct in size, number and accruing revenue.

When the Mughals took over the valley from the Chaks in 1586, they found the valley in a deplorable state. Akbar in the first instance fixed the revenue rates at one-fourth in the districts of Maraz and Kamraz.

Abul Fazl note that the system of revenue in Kashmir was by appraisalment and division of crops. "Assessments by special rates, and cash transactions were not the custom of the country." Whatever was realized from the cultivated land was

called *mal*, the expenses incurred on its assessment and collections were called *Jihat*, while the tax imposed upon various occupations and trade was known as *Sairjihat*. Some part of *Sairjihat* cesses, ( which means a variety of imposts, such as customs, transit dues, horse fees, market taxes ), were, however, taken in cash. Payment in coins and kind were estimated, in *Kharwars* or *ass-loads* of *Shali* or unpounded rice. According to Abul Fazl, all the previous *rai*'s (crop rates) were spurious and a fixed *Jama* was realized annually without obtaining information afresh regarding *Kashta* and *Uftada* lands. The new demands were fixed according to the fertility of the land, and the span of cultivation. "Although one-third had been for a long time past the normal share of the state, more than two shares were actually taken." But it appears that Akbar reduced the assessment to one-half.

In Kashmir the agriculture income was determined through a method of assessment called *Nasaq-i-Ghalla-Bakhsh*. The *Nasaq-i-Bhalla-Bakhsh*, as a method of assessment continued to be followed incessantly though towards the late of 18<sup>th</sup> century (1781) it was replaced by a pure form of crop-sharing called *Hisa-Bata-i-Nisfi*. Similarly the magnitude of the land revenue, which in the beginning was fixed at one-third and subsequently raised to one-half by Akbar, was also adhered to by his successors, though again in 1781, the access like *Jihat* and other perquisites were merged into a *Malia* so that instead of one-half, three-fourth of the gross produce was actually realized from the peasantry in kind.<sup>184</sup> The revenue concessions or reliefs were also provided, in respect of mode of payment and on the occasions of the assessment by the Mughals administration, to encourage development in cultivation ( *Kashta* ) and waste ( *Uftada* ) land as well as to stimulate cultivation for augmenting the state resources.

The Emperor Akbar, in order to ensure a marked distinction between *Kashta* and *Uftada* land, he got the whole province divided into 14 portions, and each of these, two *bitikchis* (one an Indian and the other, a Persian) were deputed to study the settlement papers of every village, ascertain therein the extent of arable and non-arable land, and finally fix the collection according to the produce.

It is clear that during the seventeenth century a very great ascent took place in the revenue of Kashmir, rising from 6.21 crore of Dams to 28 crores, an increase by four times. It cannot be argued even from the existing date that the price level increased on that scale a general price rise of *above* 50 percent only has been postulated for the seventeenth century. It is also to be noticed that the revenue of Kashmir as calculated by Irfan Habib, at 370.15 in 1709 with *Ain-i-Akbari*'s figures as base (100) showed the highest increase among all the North-Indian provinces.

More or less, Afghans continued to follow the Mughal pattern of land revenue settlement, as well as the administrative set up for the revenue collection. With the exception of the year 1765 and 1782, when owing to the economic pressure and in-built administrative contradictions, the *Peshkar* (officer in-charge of the revenue collection) was enjoyed to reimburse the *Malia* to the state coffers limitation. The *Malia* continued to be collected as usual after every *Kharif* and *Rabi* harvest.

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### **The Land Revenue Organization:**

For the purpose of revenue assessment and its collection, a large number of officials were appointed by the Mughals state and they performed their duties assigned by the imperial authority at the provincial, *pargana* and village levels. Revenue assessment and collection involved a large number of officials with the *Subedars* & *Diwan* at the top and village *Muqaddam* and *patwari* etc., at bottom (village level).

In the land revenue administration there were two types of officials, firstly those who were generally appointed by the government and were liable to transfer; secondly those who were permanent hereditary village officials such as *Muqaddam*, *patwari*, *Qanungo*, *Choudhari* and like. Their vital role was to a large extent responsible for shaping and framing the socio-economic set up of the countryside.

The *Subedar* or *Nazim* was generally the provincial head during the Mughals. He was appointed from the Centre and carried on the administration of the *Subah*. He could hold his offices as long as he enjoyed the confidence of his ruler or master. There were no hard and fast rules in their appointment, reappointment, removal, and promotion or the transfer of their office. Some *Subedars* remained in the offices for only few months, some remained in their post for one or two years, while some of them enjoyed his office for more than seven years.

On the internal front, the refractory *Zamindars*, and rebels were suppressed with a big hand and every step was taken to maintain law and order by the *Subedars*.

In the time of natural calamities like flood, drought, earthquakes, fire and epidemics, the relief measures were launched under the supervision of *Subedars*. For instance, in 1597, a terrible famine spread all over the *Subah*. Akbar ordered the *Subedar*

to open a large number of free kitchens (*langers*). During Shah Jahan's reign, a heavy flood damaged the entire crop of rice, as a result, the entire crop was destroyed and thousands of the people left Kashmir. Large number of amounts was delivered by the emperor for relief measure to the *Subedars*. The *Subedar* Zafar Khan demanded additional grant of one lakh of rupees for distribution among the peasants and also to expedite the agriculture operations during the period.

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