CHAPTER V

(Peasantry)

...
V. PEASANTRY:

Official writers may have sugar coated the bitter pill to flatter the rulers but they could not hide the brute facts of history which conditioned the status of the peasant in relation to land, his feudal lords and the ruler.

Before generalising the condition of peasantry, it seems necessary to clarify that this biggest segment of the society, which constituted about 83% of the total population, was not a homogenous class, instead it was stratified into many strata marked off from one another on the basis of legal and economic positions. We come across with many classes of peasantry, viz., peasant-cum-intermediaries and privileged peasants (Pandits and Pirzadas), collectively known as Safed Posh, Khalisa peasants (Government cultivators), Kashtkars (peasants working under privileged landholders), Assamis or Maurusi peasants (hereditary peasants), Non-resident or migratory peasants, Kandi peasants (peasants living near hills that surround the Valley and tablelands which abound in Kashmir), Pather peasants (peasants living in the low level areas but immune from floods) and Sailabi peasants (peasants living on the two banks of Jehlum which were, therefore, frequently inundated).

Peasant-cum-intermediaries:

There were alternative and overlapping institutions for the revenue extraction—Khalisa, Jagir, Chak and other systems of holdings; whereas in Jagir and Chak lands, Jagirdars and Chakdars directly collected the land revenue and other revenues from the peasants\(^2\), in the Khalsa, the state had to depend upon a class of intermediaries. Until 1859 A.D., the Kardari system existed according to which the whole Khalisa land was parcelled out among the Kardars who 'every year arranged for the cultivation of the estates by distributing the land on the basis of nafre\(^3\). After the Kardar had made his annual distribution of the land, the village passed into the hands of a person known as Shaadar, whose duty was to sit in the village and watch the crops. In a large village there were several Shaadars, one to each threshing floor. He received eight kharwars of shali from the state, and took as his

---

2. **INA, For. Deptt; Sec. Nos. 1037-38, Progs, Dec. 26, 1846; JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 76 of 1896. See also, JKA; Ministry of Revenue, Govt. of J&K, Jagirs, Muafis and Mukarraries, p. 25; M. A. Begh, Agricultural Reforms in Kashmir, pp. 10-11.**

3. **W. R. Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 402.**

The unit of nafre consisted of a man, his wife, and one adult son. To the nafre was given four acres of irrigated land. The nim nafre, or half unit, consisted of a man and his wife, and they were given two acres of irrigated land. The pao nafre, or quarter unit, was a bachelor, and he received only one and a half acres of irrigated land. **Ibid.**, See also, Wingate, Reports, p. 62.
perquisites about twelve kharwars from the village. Over the
Shagdar was an official known as Sazawol, who received for ten
months in the year Rs. 2½ per mensem. However, from 1860 A.D.,
the speculating contractors, known as Chakladars, came in, who
robbed the state and the peasants and this system continued up to
1869 A.D., when the state embarked upon a policy of "contracting
with the Mugaddams". The state, therefore, revived the old
officialdom for assessment and collection of revenue. These
village officials were Mugaddams (also known as Lambardars) and
Patwaris, the latter meant for keeping the records of the village
revenues and the former responsible for its collection. Of these
two village officials, the Lambardar was necessarily the inhabitant
of the village and that too an influential one, who would be able

4. INA, Charles Girdleston, Memorandum on Kashmir, p. 8;
Lawrence, op. cit., p. 402.
5. Ibid., See also, JKA, A Handbook of J&K State, pp. 5-7.
6. Wingate, op. cit., pp. 62-63. See also, N. D., Nargis,
7. JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR), File NO: 839 of S., 1937; JKA, Gen.
Deptt; (PR), File NO: 1261 of S. 1938; Saif-ud-Din, Diaries;
Vol. I, f. 22; See also, G. K. L. p. 110; Bates, Gazetteer,
p. 91; Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 400-403; See also, INA,
For. Deptt; Intl. A/481, Nos. 128-29, Progs, August,
1906.
8. Ibid., See also, INA, C., Girdleston, op. cit., pp. 8-9.
to exact revenue from the oppressed and, therefore, reluctant peasantry. Obviously, the basis of the influence of the Mugaddams was the possession of a big area of fertile land, they controlled by virtue of being senior settlers of the village.

Thus unlike the common peasantry which generally occupied a small area of land and cultivated only food crops, especially rice, one finds the Lambardars possessing considerably big holdings and cultivating different food and cash crops.

While not satisfied with 2% commission of the revenues which they received in lieu of collecting land and other revenues of their village, the Mugaddams often shifted the land revenue burden upon the weak. Since the land revenue was contracted with the Mugaddams and "no attempt was made by the assessing officers (even) in 1880 (when a new assessment was made) to distribute the land revenue of a village over the holdings", this most difficult...


10. INA, For. Deptt; Exlt. B/281/Nos. 629-55; Progs. March, 1885. Writing about the exceptional fruit growing interest of these Lambardars, Lawrence says:

"The best horticulturists are the more affluent Lambardars, who are beginning to pride themselves on establishing orchards with high mud walls. Kuddus Mir of Rajpura has an excellent orchard, and many other Lambardars, are following his example". Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

11. JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR); File NO: 1261 of S. 1938; Knight, *op. cit.*; pp. 64-65; *Adm. Rep. 1889-90*, p. 60.

The Lambardars were sanctioned 8% commission but afterwards it was reduced to 5% only. In the later stage, however, it was again enhanced to 8% in 1907. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 45/H-92 of 1907.
and delicate work was left to Patwari and Lambardar, with the
natural result that very little of the revenue fell on the holdings
of the Patwari and Lambardar than their enemies\(^12\). This means
that the whole burden of taxation was thrown on the weaker villagers,
especially those who could not afford to corrupt them or serve
them otherwise.\(^13\)

Apart from being hired labour, the Mugaddam and Patwari
were no exception to other officials in exacting beqar from the
poor peasants for working in their fields and doing their other
household work\(^14\). The Mugaddam's better economic condition and
influential social position might have also helped him to extend
his holding by unauthorized purchases from the oppressed peasantry
especially at the time of famines\(^15\).

12. Lawrence, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 403-23; See also, Wingate, \textit{op. cit.},
pp. 62-89; G. K. L., p. 109; G. S. Bhagwan, \textit{Warning of
Kashmir}, pp. 3-10.

pp. 41-42; G. J. Alder, \textit{British India's Northern Frontier},
pp. 97-98. See also, R. L. Handa, \textit{The History of Freedom
Struggle in Princely States}, p. 253; M. Y. Saraf, \textit{Kashmiris

14. INA, For, Deptt; Sec, E; Nos. 239-40, Progs. June, 1889;
INA, For, Deptt; Sec, E; Nos. 122-25, Progs. June, 1889,
INA, \textit{Report on Kashmir}, pp. 7-11; See also, Lawrence, \textit{op. cit.},
p. 414; Knight, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 68-69; Also, INA, For, Deptt;

In 1931, B. J. Glancy strongly recommended for the
abolition of beqar extorted by the revenue officials, which
was conceded by the Maharaja. But it continued even after

15. INA, For, Deptt; Sec; E; Nos. 81-82, Progs. March, 1883;
Lawrence, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 447.
Given the critical position of a Mugaddam, for the Sarkar, the dismissal of this rural magnate was detrimental both to the state as well as the villagers unless there was an equally powerful man available. Yet it is a common sight to find Mugaddami a hereditary institution. Generally each village had one Mugaddam who intermediated between the peasants and the state especially Tehsildar. Doubtless, numerically the peasant-cum-intermediaries was an insignificant class, but from the view point of their influential positions, the members of this class were a great power to reckon with.

Privileged Peasants:

Next to the peasant-cum-intermediaries, there was a small class of privileged peasants comprising mainly the religious class of both the Hindu and Muslim communities. Because of being respectable sections of the two communities, the state favoured these "Pandits" and "Pirzadas" by lightly taxing their land. For instance, when the Government charged four traks per kharwar from the rest of the peasantry on account of trakee cess, the Pandits and Pirzadas were charged only two traks per kharwar. The privileged

16. Ibid., Also, JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR), File NO: 816 of S. 1937; Wingate, op. cit., pp. 63-64; Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 404-7 and 447-48.

17. Ibid., See also, INA, For. Deptt; Sec. Nos. 172-73, Progs, March, 1894; Knight, op. cit., pp. 64-65.


19. Ibid., Also, JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR), File NO: 689 of S. 1941.
peasants were also exempted from begar. Given their respectable position, it was difficult for the revenue officials to impose illegal taxes on them which were, therefore, borne exclusively by the common peasants.

It were the Lambardars, Patwaris, religious class-cum-peasants and also those who acted as usurers (Waddars) who were collectively called as Safed-posh class of villagers. Lawrence gives graphic description of the position and attitudes of the safed-posh class in these words:

"The Safed-posh class of villagers, that is the more affluent men, who wear on white clothes, do not work, but look on while others toil. They have a better kind of house and often have excellent gardens and good orchards. They sometimes indulge in the luxury of a private cemetery. They ride the small ponies of the country and travel great distances, carrying their bedding with them. They pay frequent visits to the city, and are usually connected in marriage with Srinagar families. Their lives are fairly easy, and they have considerable influence in the villages. They have not much sympathy for the ordinary cultivators, and they are always spoken of in the country-side as Darbari men, who side with the native officials."
Different institutions for revenue extraction had different implications for the various segments of agrarian society affected by them. Thus on the one hand, there was a big area of land known as Khalsa whose revenues directly went to the state through a chain of officials, while on the other, there was a sizable land which was under the privileged right holders like Chakdars, Muafidars and land-revenue assignees (Jagirdars). The two institutions had contrasting effects on the peasants working under these two systems. The state cultivators—a term used in the Assessment Reports for the peasants working on Khalsa land—were worst hit, a fact which has been unanimously referred to by our sources. Unlike the Chak and Jagir villages, the state cultivators had no influential person at their back who would save them from official persecution. Little wonder, therefore, we find the Khalsa peasants, who, no doubt, formed the major segment of peasant population, facing exclusively the brunt of begar, illegal exactions and official harrassment. Referring to the fact that the

24. INA, For. Deptt; K.W. Sec; E; Nos. 106-10, Progs. Feb., 1890; INA, Peasant Position, pp. 1-6. See also, JKA, Ministry of Revenue, Govt. of J&K, Jairos, Musfis and Mukarraries.


whole burden of **begar** fell upon the **Khalsa** peasants, which marked them off in prosperity from the peasants working under **Chakdar** and other influential persons, Andrew Wingate says:

"Another matter urgently demanding attention is the manner in which **begar**, or forced labour, is managed...

At present **Chakdar**'s lands, **Jagir** and other specially assigned villages, villages secretly bought or in possession of officials or influential persons, are all exempt. I rode through a particular nice village with a little bazar, and the women and children looking to the trained observer in many little ways better off than the average. I said this village is doing very well, but was answered at once it belongs to so and so, mentioning a well-known official. No coolie can be seized in villages so protected, and that is one of the main reasons that the **Khalsa** cultivators seek to transfer themselves to some nearer shelter. Consequently, the whole burden of providing coolies falls upon the **Khalsa** villages, and mostly on those too small and poor to attract anybody's care."  

The remission from Gilgit **begar** on account of the personal influence of the **Jagirdar** and **Chakdar** and the protection against highly illegal exactions, which the peasants of the influential assigned villages enjoyed, attracted many Khalsa

---

27. **Wingate, op. cit.**, p. 104. The same idea has been echoed by **Lawrence** in these words:

"The rule which exempts all Jagir and Dharmarth villages, all tenants of **Chakdars**, and all Hindus from **begar** is injurious to the interests of the state, and oppressive to the Mussalman cultivators of Khalsa villages..... They (peasants) left their villages in order to escape from **begar**, and they, no doubt, are more comfortable on the **Chakdar**'s estate than they ever were in their old villages." **INA, Peasant Position**, pp. 1-2.
peasants to flee from their lands and settle in the lands of
the privileged right-holders²⁸, though the state strictly forbade
the Chakdars to attract the Khalsa peasants²⁹. Writing about the
migration of Khalsa peasants to Chak lands, Wingate says:

"At present cultivators are better treated by Chakdars
than by Tehsildars, and as they are mostly protected from
seizure as coolies, Chakdars, in spite of their occasional
oppression, are on the whole popular, and they (Chakdars)
find little difficulty in attracting cultivators from
Khalsa lands and in extending the limits of their estates".³⁰

As a matter of fact the migration of peasants from
Khalsa lands to the lands of the privileged right-holders has been
a striking feature even upto the thirties of the present century³¹

Unlike the Khalsa peasants, the Chak, muafis, dharmarth
and Jagir peasants escaped from the oppression of auction sales,
as we have no evidence of farming out of villages by any privileged
right-holder or land revenue assignee. It was because of the
relatively comfortable position of the peasants of the specially

²⁸. Ibid., Also, INA, For. Deptt; K. W; Sec; E; Nos. 106-10,
Progs. Feb., 1890; JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR); File NO: 1226/Q
of S. 1946; W, Digby, op. cit., pp. 266-67; Wingate,

²⁹. JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR), File NO: 813 of S. 1936-38; JKA,
Gen. Deptt; (PR), File NO: 622-A/C of S. 1937, INA, Peasant
Position, pp. 1-3; JKA, Ministry of Revenue, J&K Government,
Jagirs, Muafis and Mukarraries, pp. 7-8.

³⁰. Wingate, op. cit., p. 98.

³¹. INA, For. & Pol. Deptt; Extl. A, Nos. 226-29, Progs. March,
1917; INA, For. & Pol. Deptt; Extl. A/Intl, B; 1243-68,
Progs. Dec. 1921; JKA, For. & Pol. Deptt; File NO: 34/R-3
of 1927; Census, 1931, pp. 90-99. See also, Saraf, op. cit.,
assigned villages that we find them yielding better agricultural returns than those of the Khalsa villages.

Hereditary and Migratory Peasants:

From the viewpoint of rights, or to be more accurate, "shadowy rights" in land, we find two categories of peasants—assami or maurusi peasants and non-residential or migratory peasants. Assami or mirasdar peasant was a peasant who lived a settled life and cultivated the land occupied by him or received by him from his forefathers without deserting it; though in theory they were, like other peasants, tenants-at-will but practically their hereditary occupancy rights were respected by the state. However, since like other peasants they did not enjoy any superior right over the produce of the land, their "occupancy rights" had, therefore, no material significance. But it was this class of peasantry which by virtue of being permanent cultivators of Khalsa land were provided with the occupancy rights in 1894-95 and the ownership rights later in 1933.

32. Ibid. To quote Lawrence, "It is unnecessary to remark that as a rule, the cultivation in Jagir and Dharwarth villages, and on Chakdar's estate is infinitely better than which is found in Khalsa villages," INA, Peasant Position, pp. 1-2. See also, INA, For. Deptt; K.W; Sec. E; Nos. 106-10, Progs. Feb., 1890.

33. The migratory peasants have been divided into five categories, Census, 1931, pp. 94-95, For full details see Infra, fn. 174.

34. For details of assami, see Lawrence, op. cit., p. 428.

35. Ibid., pp. 428-29; See also, JKA, A Handbook of J&K State, pp. 13-14.

36. Ibid., Also, Wingate, op. cit., p. 86.

The oppressive taxation system coupled with the indifferent attitude of the state and official oppression created a class of peasantry which did not settle permanently anywhere, instead the members of this class migrated from one place to another in search of comparatively relieved conditions. These peasants are referred to in the Old English Records as non-resident (migratory) peasants. Since land was abundant and in the given taxation system, occupation of land had hardly any material significance for the peasants; the peasant found no difficulty in migrating from one place to the other. Obviously, these peasants had no worth-noting immovable property nor even a house worth the name to lose at the time of shifting from one place to the other. To quote Lawrence:

---


40. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 47/RL-169 of 1892; JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 300-R/L-188 of 1913; JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 34/R-3 of 1927; See also, INA, For. & Pol. Deptt; Sec; PTD; NO: 19(6), P, Progs, June, 1924; INA, For. & Pol. Deptt; Intl. B; Nos., 1-2, Progs, January, 1928.

41. Ibid,
"It must be remembered that the ordinary villager possessed little but his clothes and his sheep, it was very easy to find a house, which with a little repair could be made fit for habitation. He left nothing dear behind him but his vegetable plot.  

Though migratory life was practically a difficult life and that the state tried all methods to check it, but oppression was too severe and food scarcity too great to enable the state to succeed in its efforts. It is strange to find the migratory peasantry constituting numerically a large segment than those who lived a settled life.  

42. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 420.  
43. Ibid., JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR), File NO: 1086 of 3, 1933; JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR) File NO: 338 of 3, 1937; Genesh Lal, Siyarah-i-Kashmir, p. 32; Wingate, op. cit., p. 54. See also, JKA, For. & Pol. Deptt; File NO: 34/R-3 of 1927.  
44. Ibid., Also, INA, For. Deptt; Sec. E; Nos. 81-82, Progs, March, 1883.  
45. To quote Wingate:

"The revenue system leaves the cultivator without protection. His one concern is to get enough to eat, and when he fails in one tehsil he betakes himself to another. Consequently hereditary occupations are few, and if any proof were wanting of the unsatisfactory condition of agriculture, it is the fact that large numbers have only cultivated their present lands for a few years. In a highly fertile Valley to find the peasantry roving from village to village is a clear sign that the administration is faulty. Wingate, op. cit., p. 78. For more details see, INA, M. Fanshaw, Famine in Kashmir; JKA, Food Control in Kashmir; JKA, A Note on J&K State."
Kandi, Pathar and Sailabi Peasants:

One also finds economic differentiation among the peasantry at inter-village and intra-local level. This differentiation was the result of different ecotypes that obtained in Kashmir and also because of the faulty administrative system which provided a chance to the stronger to flourish at the cost of the weaker section.

Three basic ecotype categories each with variant forms were to be found during our period; the mountain slopes, the tablelands and the low-level lands, which consequently gave birth to three types of peasants with varying economic conditions. The mountain slopes and the table lands which constituted a large chunk of the land were unaccessible to the natural sources of irrigation. Thus those villages which were situated on mountain slopes (Kandi areas) or table-lands (Karewas) could not grow any crop other than those which could survive arid and semi-arid


47. Ibid. Also, INA, Imperial Gazetteer, Vol. XV, pp. 71-98; Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 44-50.
The low-lying areas of the Valley which enjoyed assured and adequate irrigation facilities cultivated the highly-valued rice crop. This division of cropping pattern between the low and high level lands, produced some important socio-economic results. First, since the rainfed crops, demanded more labour but yielded very little and that too if there was an adequate rainfall at the appropriate time, the condition of peasants living in this arid ecotype area was extremely bad. The condition was, however, quite reverse in low lying areas which produced the high yielding crop namely rice.

Besides, in the Kandi areas the daily ranges of temperature and humidity were far lower than were required for a reasonable return of a crop. Therefore, the crop had a stunted growth and only inferior kinds of rice having low returns could be grown there. The Kandi villages also suffered because the crops became the victim of the cold breeze which below from off the mountain peaks and chilled and shrivelled the farming grain. This is known

---


as Handru in Kashmir. This was not certainly the situation in the low-lying areas where the temperature usually used to be good and the water warm enough for a good paddy crop. This was besides the fact that the soil cover had enormous thickness in the bowl of Kashmir. It is because of these reasons that one finds dense population in low-lying areas and very sparse population in the high alluvial areas of the Valley.

The economic differentiation among the peasantry was also the result of the heterogenous character of land. There were different kinds of land with varied fertility status. That is why one finds a wide variety in cropping intensity. This variation is not only to be found at intra-local or inter-village levels, but it could be observed at intra-village level too. No wonder, therefore, there were some paddy lands which produced as much as forty-six kharwars per kharwar, but there were also other tracts.

51. **Supra**, fn. 49.

Handru is that stuff of rice which does not ripe in time. This type of damage to rice crop is caused generally by early snowfall, which in turn gives rise to cold winds that hinder the ripening of the crop on plants. The husk and the grain of the plant remain totally green. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 335.


53. **Supra**, fn. 46.


55. **Supra**, fn.48; Lawrence, *op. cit.*, pp. 435-36.
which did not yield more than twenty five kharwars per kharwar. W. R. Lawrence was so much convinced of this fact that he frankly confessed, "For assessment purposes in Kashmir, the village itself is a large and dangerous generalization. If I had time and an establishment... I should have treated the holding and not the village as the unit to be valued."

It is also to be noted that the condition of those peasants who lived on the two banks of the river Jhelum was worse than that of the peasants who lived in the low-lying areas but were immune from inundations. The villages which were situated on the two banks of the Jhelum were frequently inundated resulting in the destruction of the crops and sweeping away the houses and livestock of the inhabitants. Hence these villages could hardly find a breathing time to rehabilitate themselves.

One also finds a differentiation in the economic condition of the peasantry on the basis of the disparity in the availability of irrigation facilities. The disparity in the irrigation

56. Supra, fn. 46.

57. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 436.


facilities divided Kashmir into two broad divisions—the Paiab villages (villages deficient in sufficient irrigation facilities) and the Sairab villages (villages having adequate irrigation facilities). Hence the peasants of the Sairab villages were better placed than those of the Paiab villages.

The faulty administrative system and the resultant rampant corruption benefitted some influential villages at the cost of poor ones. For example, the khowat or so-called cash settlement of 1880 assessed the revenue of each village in cash after fixing the prices of its agricultural crops. The new system gave arbitrary powers to a Tehsildar as it was his discretion as to how much revenue he would collect in kind and how much in cash from a particular village. Since revenue could be paid in cotton and oil-seeds (Ghala kimiti) also and that the price of these crops were very high as compared to food crops particularly paddy; a fairly well-to-do village offered a handsome bribe to a Tehsildar so that he would accept the revenue either in cotton or oil-seed or in cash. In this way the whole brunt of paddy demand fell upon the poor villages, who had to part with a large portion of their produce for the state, the prices of paddy and other food crops being deliberately kept far-below as compared to the prices

60. Ibid.
61. INA, For. Deptt; Pol. B; NO: 19, Progs, No. 1883; Wingate, op. cit., pp. 64-67; A. Neve, op. cit., p. 55.
of cotton or oil-seeds. Thus those villages which managed to pay land revenue in cash crops not only secured enough to live upon, but they also escaped from losing a very big part of their shali whose prices were far below than those of the other crops, especially cotton or oil-seeds. Subsequently, the poor village had to purchase shali from the state granaries (kotas) at a far higher rate. The arbitrary powers of the Tehsildars in annually settling the demand in cash and kind known as Mulwaza therefore, benefitted the rich at the cost of the poor.

The officials also misused some measures designed by the state to help the poor. Thus one finds that instead of helping the poor, these measures created further disparity between the rich and the poor. For instance, the state had devised a policy of curtailing the revenue of those villages which were designated as Sakin-ul-hal villages. However, one finds that this concession was frequently enjoyed by an influential village which could afford to provide a big bribe to the corrupt revenue official headed by Tehsildar. To quote Lawrence:


"When I commenced the inspection of villages, I soon found that the Sankim-ul-hal villages were often in far better condition that others not on the list, and I have discovered that the whole system of arrears was a conspiracy between the headman of the villages and the officials to defraud the state."

Similarly, the state, while realizing that under the given system of over-taxation, the peasant could not afford to save grains for seeds, had envisaged a relief measure to provide seeds to every peasant known as tukhni-musada. All the same, we find that instead of reaching this relief to the peasantry, the officials divided this grain among themselves and the cost of the grain was entered as arrears against the village.

The land revenue was a regressive tax because it was not only levied on every peasant regardless of the variation in the size of their holdings, but also that every peasant whether big or small had to pay some amount of land revenue demand. In this way it reinforced stratification in the peasantry.

BACKGROUND OF THE PEASANT POVERTY:

Barring a few peasants, whom we have already referred to, the condition of general peasantry was one of chronic poverty. In fact, according to the contemporary observers the condition of Kashmiri peasantry was worse than that of the peasants living

68. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 407.
69. Supra fn. 67; Saif-ul-Din, op. cit., Vol. III, f. 21.
70. Ibid., See also, JKA, Gen. Deptt; (PR), File NO: 807/Q-A of S. 1939; R. Handa, op. cit., pp. 250-53.
71. Ibid.
elsewhere in India. This is also substantiated by the fact that even in normal times the peasant could not dream of having a food-stock which could suffice his basic necessities till he could harvest his crops. This was due to the fact that in Kashmir the state demand from the peasant was far in excess of his surplus produce (i.e. the produce over and above that required for his subsistence). It is, therefore, no wonder to come across a decline in the number of Kashmiri peasants and, to see them moving from place to place, bereft of any prosperity except a small mud-house, a few earthen pots, merr, straw and a few cattle. He would not afford any cloth except the domestically woven pattu which he wore regardless of its suitability to the changing seasons of Kashmir. True, for the mass of peasantry, life was a battle for bare survival. And there is no denying the fact that the history of the economic development of Kashmiri peasantry cannot be traced before the thirties of the present century when under the pressure of the National Movement, some important measures were taken to improve the lot of the peasant.

72. Wingate, op. cit., p. 61; INA, Peasant Position, pp. 1-6; INA, For. Deptt; K.W; Sec. E; Nos. 106-10; Erogs, Feb., 1890; Younghusband, Kashmir; p. 174; E. F. Neve, Beyond the Pir Panjal, pp. 264-85; Also, Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 403-11.
73. Ibid.
74. Knight, op. cit., pp. 69-70; A. Neve, op. cit., p. 139; Wingate, op. cit., p. 78.
75. Supra, fn. 32 and 33.
76. Tyndale Bisco, Kashmir in Sunlight and Shade, p. 87; Knight, op. cit., pp. 76-77; Lawrence, op. cit., p. 250.
77. INA, R. Longan, op. cit., pp. 3-5; Lawrence, op. cit., p. 251.
class. The deplorable condition of the peasantry was not fortuitous, instead it was the result of the high pitch of land revenue demand and illegal exactions, begar, repressive policies of the government, the waddari system, and others, a detailed account of which is given below:

Land Revenue and other taxes:

Maharaja Gulab Singh followed the Sikh procedure of agrarian taxation. In addition to the half share of the produce, trakee cess at the rate of four trake per kharwar, patwar and sanungo tax, marriage tax and the like were charged from the peasants. Records show that the peasant had to pay about fourteen trake, but if sixteen to the state and its corrupt officials.

78. Though some measures were taken to improve the condition of the peasantry during the reign of Maharaja Hari Singh (1925–1947), but in reality, the peasantry was least benefitted. Actually it was after 1947 that the real prosperity ushered in the peasantry.


81. Ibid.

The taxes charged from the cultivators were numerous and varied and these were both legal and illegal, categorized as Koul and Rasum. Besides, they provided things free of cost to a chain of revenue officials in the form of poultry, sheep, ghee, blankets and various kinds of grains, wood, grass and sometimes even cow and ponies. The Dogras left no field without being taxed. The social customs, right to legalise marriage and the office of grave-digger and prostitutes were taxed. The peasantry also had to pay a tax known as Ashqul to support Hindu priests, for each milch-cow, half a seer of ghee and ten fowls from each house were taken annually and had also to pay Rasum-i-Dehri (for maintenance of Royal palace) upto three hundred to four hundred rupees annually but the kardar charged it both in kind and cash.

83. Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 414-15; INA, Peasant Position, pp. 1-3; INA, For. Deptt; K.W; Sec. B; Nos. 106-10, Progs, Feb., 1890.
For full details of the Koul and rasum, see the Chapter, Agrarian Taxes.

84. INA, For. Deptt; Sec; E; Nos. 239-40; Progs, June, 1889; INA, For. Deptt; Sec; E; Nos. 729-55, Progs, June, 1889.
See also, Lawrence, op. cit., p. 144.


86. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 417.

87. Ibid.


The Patwari and Lambardar mostly falsified the revenue accounts of the cultivator against huge bribes. It is worth noting that even the Shigdar whose duty was only to watch the crops black-mailed the peasants with the threat of false accusation that they had stolen the grain, and likewise his supervisor, Sazawal, also extorted money from the villagers. The weighman, Tarazuder, cheated them at the time of taking government share by taking eighteentraksof kharwar instead of sixteentrak kharwar. Thus it appears that all the officials big or small were corrupt and fraudulent and lived "free on villagers on whom they levied exactions in the form of systematic toll".

The landlords also did not spare the cultivators. The services which various professionals and menials of the village rendered to them were paid by levying various cesses on the cultivators. For instance, a cess known as virit was charged from the cultivator at the rate of one sai per gunar to defray the charges of the services rendered by the blacksmith and the carpenter of the village. In addition to this, other cesses like Bodh, Nanwan, Maswari, Batwal, Malba, Sunar, Chowkidari, Nehari, etc., also were charged on the peasantry. The jagirdars also

91. Wingate, op. cit., p. 49.
93. Thorp, op. cit., p. 4.
94. Ibid., pp. 50-51.
96. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 122 of 1896.
97. Ibid.
charged 5% tax as Lambardari, 13/2/-% as Patwari, 8% as road cess, 8% as school cess and 8% as Zaildari cess from their peasants, and only between 1874-1884, about twenty two kinds of cesses were levied on the cultivators by the Jagirdars. Thus it is clear that the peasant was extracted to a great maximum and very little was left to him to survive. One wonders how, in these circumstances, the peasant would have really survived? The fact remains that he mostly ate wild fruits and grew some vegetables which he let free from the official extraction and used these as his food for survival.

**Begar**

In addition to over-taxation, what fell like a dreadful pestilence on the cultivators in the midst of their working season was the iniquitous institution of begar (forced labour). It is interesting to note that the whole demand of begar was thrown on

98. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File No: 76 of 1896.
99. For full details, see Chapter, Jagir, Chak and Muafii.
100. There was not any professional labour class in Kashmir, agricultural land being sufficiently available for the existing population. Whatever labour was available in the cities was exempt from begar and thus the whole brunt fell on rural population, especially on peasantry. Labour was mostly required to carry loads to Gilgit or render services to the foreign visitors. Gilgit being a frontier district of Kashmir, the Maharaja was bound to defend the frontiers under treaty obligations. So normally loads were carried to send provisions and other essentials for the maintenance of the army over there and when there used to be some kind of disturbance, the quantum of army movement would increase the dimensions of begar and thousands of beqaris, therefore, were pressed into service as human carriage of load. What made it a forced labour was that it was taken, against will, when the peasants used to be busy with their farming operations.
the Khalsa peasants as along with the city and town population, Pandits, Pirzadas, Sikhs and the peasants of privileged right-holders were exempt from becar. Bebar was of two kinds: (i) impressed and under-paid labour, and (ii) forced and unpaid labour. This categorisation of becar is also hinted at by the following words:

"Becar means to a Kashmiri far more than the mere impressment of labour, for under its comprehensive name every kind of demand for labour and property taken but not paid for by the officials was included."

Of the first kind of forced labour, the most pronounced one was that labour which was demanded from the peasants for carrying loads. The physical geography of Kashmir and the absence of modern means of communication demanded a sizable labour class for transportation purpose; but during the Dogra period this demand assumed enormous proportions owing to two factors. First, because of the threat of Russian expansion, a big military...


102. However, the Resident has categorized the becar into two kinds, viz., (i) forced labour and (ii) forced supplies (JKA, From Resident to Chief Minister, Pol. & Genr., Deptt; File No: 213/F-106 of 1913).


105. The English had conquered almost the whole of India by the dawn of Dogra period, and the boundaries of British...
a fresh urgency of making a sufficient number of labour carriers available who would ensure the transportation of supplies and luggage to and from Gilgit. Secondly, we find that during the period under study, there was a great influx of European visitors and officials into Kashmir. In the absence of any modern means of communication, it generated a further increase in the demand for load carriers. Since for economic and political reasons the state could not avoid the responsibility of providing all the facilities to the visitors and officials, the raising of labour power of load carriers became an important feature of the Dogra administration.

India had touched the Russian border. Since Russia was expanding her territories in Central Asia, it, therefore, posed a threat to the British which became alarmed on such expansion. So the British government in India tried its best to checkmate the Russian expansion and to guard her northern borders, it established the Gilgit Agency in 1877 in Leh.

The military strength of the Dogras stationed at Gilgit in 1863 was about 5,000 to 6,000 men, and the becarias had to carry the provisions and other necessaries for this garrison from Srinagar to Gilgit. A.S. Chohen, op. cit., p. 14.

Since Kashmir was under the supremacy of the British Govt. of India, the European visitors and officials started coming to Kashmir in large numbers after the establishment of Dogra rule in Kashmir, Saif-ud-Din, op. cit., Vol. IV, f. 21.

Since the Dogra Maharajas owed their rulership to the British Govt. of India, it had become a liability for them to provide all facilities to the officers and other men of their overlords in order to
Of these two kinds of forced labour, the Gilgit begar was the worst. To quote Lawrence:

"Gilgit to the Kashmiri is a constant terror, and when it was rumoured that transport was wanted to carry the baggage of the troops going to or coming from Gilgit, there was a general stampede among the villagers. I have seen whole villages bivouacking on the mountains when the agents for the collection of transport arrived in their tehsil, and I have seen inhuman punishment dealt out to men who demurred to leave their homes..." 110

The reluctance on the part of the peasants to be employed for Gilgit begar was not only because a peasant had to leave his home for two or three months 111 but more so because there was hardly any hope for his safe return, as they generally perished because of hunger and thirst and also because of pestilence and unclimacy of weather. 112 E. F. Knight gives a pathetic picture of Gilgit begar in these words:

P.N.109 contd.

appease them. Initially it was with this motive to provide facilities to the British officers and visitors in Kashmir; an officer on Special duty was appointed in Kashmir.


111. The to and fro journey to Gilgit took at least two to three months for a peasant to carry the loads. INA, (Calcutta Records) For. Deptt; Sec; E. Nos. 239-40, Progs, June 29, 1889; Lawrence, Op. cit., p. 413.

112. Those who survived, most of these were then sold to the inhabitants of that region. This horrible story has been given by Tendle Biscoe in these words:

"At Bandipura they (peasants) were collected and loaded up. The only ration allowed them was a seer of rice per day; this they had to carry, plus the straw for making their straw-shoes (Pulhory) plus their load of food for the garrison. No provision was made for them as they crossed the snow passes, so that many died on the road, and often it happened that when they did reach Gilgit; they were sold as slaves to the wild inhabitants of that inhospitable region. The grandfather of one of my servants, who was sent there, was exchanged for a Chinese dog, but later on he escaped. Tyndale Biscoe, Kashmir Sunlight and Shade, p. 36."
There is just begar and begar that becomes the most harmful instrument that can be placed in the hands of an unscrupulous official. Many thousands of villagers have been driven off every year to toil as carriers of burden on the Gilgit road. The Kashmir authorities have been utterly careless of the comfort and even of the lives, of the unfortunate wretches who are dragged from their homes and families. They fall on the road to perish of hunger and thirst, and thinly clad, as they are, are destroyed in hundreds, at a time, by the cold of the snowy peaks. When a man is seized for this form of begar, his wife and children hang upon him, weeping taking it almost for granted, that they will never see him more. A gang of these poor creatures laden with grain, toiling along the desert crags between Astor and Gilgit, on a burning summer day, urged on by a guard, is perhaps as pitiable a spectre as any to be seen on the roads of Siberia. But these are not convicts and criminals, they are Muslim farmers, harmless subjects of the Maharaja.  

A. Neve writes:
"In May 1888, I was on cholera duty at Islamabad (present Anantnag). Just as the epidemic was reaching its height and hundreds were dying every day in all the districts around, a levy of 5,000 or more coolies was called for. The villagers were most distracted with fear, who would do all their agricultural work? What would happen during their long absence to their wives and children? To what perils of pestilence and inclimacy of weather would they be exposed in the crowded bivouacs and snowy passes of that dreaded Gilgit district? I was present at a sort of farewell service on a maidan outside Islamabad, when nearly 1,000 men were starting and when they took leave of the friends who had accompanied them so far, loud was the sobbing of some, fervid the demeanour of all of us, let by the Mullah, they intoned their prayers and chanted some of their special penitential psalms. Braver men might well have been agitated at such a time. It is certain that cholera clung to the camp and that the unburied corpses of hundreds of these poor begaris marked the whole line of march from Srinagar to Bunji." A. Neve, Op. cit., p. 140.
No wonder, therefore, we find the villagers either paying a very huge sum of rupees 70/- to 90/- per head or disposing of their "shadowy rights in land" to some influential person for purchasing their exemption from *bener*.

The forced labour proved inimical to the peasant in other way too. His absence left his land unattended and, therefore, had to face a great loss. That is why we find the peasant showing all reluctance to leave his village even for carrying a load for even an easy stage.


"... And the ugliest side of the *bagar* system is the manner in which the state authorities exploit it to meet their personal gains... They even go to the extent of securing purchases of villages at nominal small sums on promise of exemption from the *bager*, which have reduced the peasants to a status of serfdom and slavery." INA, For, Deptt; Sec; E; Progs, June, 1889.

115. "A call for *bargar* is equal to death knell for thousands of villagers, who being forced to accept the call, reluctantly leave their homes for two or three months with the prospect of death from cold or starvation. The system is horrible both from the humanitarian and economic point of view. From the humanitarian point of view, it is an outrage against the dignity of the peasants individuality and honour. From an economic point of view, the absence of the peasants from their fields often brings the agricultural activities to a standstill causes heavy losses to the state as well as the peasants." INA, For, Deptt; Sec; E; Nos. 233-40, Progs, June, 1889.

116. INA, For, Deptt; B, Pol, E; Nos. 52-63, Progs, Oct., 1883; Also, Lawrence, *Op. Cit.* p. 413.
The labour impressed for *begar* was much exploited by the officials to fill their purses. Both A. Wingate and W. R. Lawrence have given us a clear picture of the corrupt and cruel manipulation of corvee (*begar*) by the officials. To quote Wingate:

"A requisition is made, say, for 500 coolies.

The Tehsildar doubles the number. His emissaries quadruple it, and so a village that ought to supply, perhaps, five coolies, is asked for twenty. Fifteen men have to buy themselves off. It is notorious that this year large sums have been illegitimately collected in this way".117

Lawrence also echoes this sad fact in the same vein:

"I have often been present when a requisition for carriage arrives in a village, the following account of the system is a simple statement of what used to be an everyday occurrence. Someone in Srinagar wants ten coolies or porters to carry his baggage for a stage, or for one or more stages. The official to whom the requisition is made passes on the order of the district officer, and in order to make sure that there will be no deficiency in the number of the coolies writes twenty men are wanted. The district officer writes to the Tehsildar, and acting on the same prudent calculation, orders fourty coolies. The Tehsildar then seizes eighty coolies from the villages. Nearly all these eighty men are engaged, perhaps, in weeding or watering their rice, and as

they do not know how long they may be kept waiting in Srinagar, and as they dread that in their absence their fields will run dry or will be choked with weeds, they are not allured by the idea of a wage of four annas a day which they may or may not receive. Bargaining begins, and if the official in charge of the business is a smart man he will take seventy-four annas from the seventy villagers whom he exempts and will send in ten men to Srinagar. If he is a very smart man he will take eighty-four annas from the eighty villagers and will still send ten men to Srinagar.119

The other side of begar was also a great trouble to the villagers.118 They were forced to carry government goods and other officials' equipments, serve the officials, constructing canals and roads, perform the guard duty or any other work required by the official, facilitating the journey and hunting of the rulers and officials, without any regard to the fact how much busy they may be.120 Even those attending on their patients or carrying on urgent personal works were not spared. Not only this, even if

he was busy in the preparations for any festival or attending any marriage ceremony or even busy with his marriage, the state officials force him for any work they like. Dilating on such occurrences, the Daily Guru Ghantal writes in its issue of January 3, 1927 as under:

"...the Nawab Sahib of Kotli had the intention to visit all the mountains of Kashmir Valley, the state government had collected a huge number of coolies for his carriage. One day he was about to ride a horse to go on a visit, that he saw some poor coolies camping nearby. He went to talk to them. During the conversation, he came to know that they are the members of a Baraat (bride-groom's party) who were on their way back to their village with the bride. But they were caught hold of by the state officials for the purpose of begar and that too for him (Nawab Sahib). After knowing all this, he regretted and let them free after approaching the officers."

The Daily Siyasat writes:

"... It were the days of the holly Idd-uz-Zuha. The Muslims were preparing to celebrate this festival with great enthusiasm according to the sunnat-i-Rasool (S.A.W.). Around the same time, the Maharaja (Pratap Singh) began preparations for a Hindu festival Kheer Bhawani's pilgrimage. Hundreds of begaris and Hanjis were caught. As the departure was about to take place, the Raja Sahib (the Prince Hari Singh) received some eye injury. His Highness the Maharaja Pratap Singh postponed the Kheer Bhawani Yatra and within no time reached Gulmarg in his motor car. In consequence, the begaris and Hanjis were let off in such a way as the wild beasts were set free from their cages. The Siyasat, dated August 9, 1924, p. 2.

The forced labour proved detrimental in other way as well. Sometimes the sons of the deceased revenue defaulters were subjected to begar for repayment of state dues by the officials, which proves the fact that it got the hereditary nature during the period. Not only this, the peasantry was pressed for road construction, carriage for officials both officials and private as begaris and also to cut wood from the jungle for the royal use. The officials also used the begar for their personal interests to fill their coffins. How a Tehsildar or Naib while visiting a village not only extorts things from the peasants but also forces them to serve him at his residence as slaves:

"One day, the Naib Tehsildar had to visit the village, the whole populace, men, women and children would wait on both sides of the road leading to the village. On a high ground, under the Chinar, the shady tree, sitting arrangements would be made in advance, by spreading woollen blankets, cabbas, and namdas. The Naib would come on a horse, accompanied by a Muslim sais and the Pandit patwari and kardar. He was

124. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 213/P-106 of 1913.
   When Col. Nisbet was appointed as the Resident in Kashmir, his baggage, furniture and other goods were carried by the poor peasants as begaris. The Statesman, dated April 1, 1890.
126. "And the ugliest side of the begar system is the manner in which the state authorities exploit it to meet their personal gains. They (officials) have taken it for granted that begar is an incident of serfdom which has entitled them to take things such as milk, poultry, ghee, blankets, ponies, horses, cows, sheep, fruit, etc., free of cost from the village." INA, For. Deptt; Sec; E; Nos. 239-40, Progs, June, 1889.
received by the Nambardar of the village after the guard of honour presented by the village populace, in the shape of wunwon or the ladies coral singing. He would then sit on the highest pedestal, relaxing against the pillows and diwans as a Mughal dandy. One by one, the applicants would bow before him and pray for mutation of land or any other matter. The peasants would keep, presents like birds, rice, ghee, lamb, hidden under their garments and by sign show it to the Naib, who would dispose off the cases one by one. In the evening, when he had to depart for his city home, some villagers would be selected by the Nambardar to carry the presents to the Naib's home. When he reaches his home, not only his legs would be massaged, but his horse also. It was a common practice that a young Muslim peasant lady would serve as a milkmaid for the babies of the Pandit Naib, so that sucking of milk from breasts of Naib's wife would not affect her beauty. The baby of the milkmaid would cry for mother's milk in the stable. Her husband would serve as a servant entrusted with washing of kitchen utensils. But neither the maid nor the husband could enter the kitchen for fear of polluting it.¹²⁷

Such was the oppressive system of begar which crushed the peasantry to a great extent. In any case the begar had made the condition of the peasantry most miserable. His position was virtually reduced to a slave who was sometimes sold like a chattel and put to any kind of infliction. In conclusion the words of B. E. V. Schonberg regarding his condition is worth quoting:

¹²⁷INA, Report on Kashmir, pp. 41-42, INA, For. Deptt; A, Pol; Sec; E; Nos. 1253-65, Progs, Sept., 1927. See also, The Inqilab, dated July 19, 1930.
"I have been in many lands, but nowhere did the condition of the human beings present a more saddening spectacle than in Kashmir. It vividly recalled the history of Israelites under the Egyptian rule when they were flogged at their daily labour by their pitiless task masters. And here the same picture presents itself man raises his hand against his fellow men, and for no other object than to excite physical pain".123

**Waddari (Money Lending System):**

Kashmir being unfavourably disposed in terms of good communication system could not enter into external trade into a large measure. Also the trade in food products being by and large government monopoly129 then, there could only emerge a wide spread network of village *Banja* shops manned by Muslim hucksters (*Wadis* and *Bakals*) and other Hindus. Besides making petty sales of necessaries of life they assumed the role of *waddari*, *sanukars*, and *Khojas*, and this role of theirs was menacing for the needy cultivator. They would often lend money and other items of their needs to cultivators and then charge them an exorbitant interest.130

---


The official sources reveal four types of money-lending system that existed during the period of our study, viz., *Wad, Rakh, Kul*, and *Angi*, but *Wad* system was very common in the state as such. JKA, For. & Pol. Deptt; File NO: 37/F-29 of 1923; JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 123 of 1921, See also, JKA, *Report on the Working of the Cooperative Societies in the J&K State, 1924*, p. 3. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 5.

Since the revenue was taken mostly in kind and the maximum portion was extorted from him by the state and its officials, the peasant, having very little left, was compelled by circumstances to borrow money or other goods from these money lenders, and usually undertook to get their money in grain at ensuring harvest, at a fixed rate mutually agreed upon between the parties at the time of the loan. However, no Hujrat (bond) was signed by the borrower, but had to content with the fake accounts maintained by the Waddar. The loan could be paid back often in kind, such as blankets, ghee, grain, fruit etc., to the waddar. Andrew Wingate has given a graphic picture of this in these words:

"....On the other side a gigantic Bania's shop rolling out food to the poor in exchange for their togers and keeping with every cultivator an account showing what is taken from him whether in the way of grain, oil, wood, pulses cows, cattle, cotton, wool to spin and weave and a hundred petty details."

132. See the Chapter, "Agrarian Taxes".


It is worth noting that these money-lenders instead of charging interest directly, multiplied their profits at high rates (Lawrence, op. cit., p. 5). Lawrence says that the rate of interest charged was 24% to 30% (Ibid., p. 397).

135. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 5; Jalali, op. cit., p. 138.

136. Wingate, op. cit., p. 56.
Since the cultivators borrowed money from these money-
lenders under unfavourable conditions, the rates charged, therefore,
were exceedingly high. Bazaz gives a detailed account of this
system in these words:

"Rural indebtedness is staggering. The Government never
took the trouble of making any inquiry in this behalf.
Incomplete and haphazard non-official enquiries show that
more than 70% of the people living in the villages are
under debt. In numerous cases the produce of the land is
pawned long before it is visible in the fields. Once a
debt has been contracted it is never "fully" paid back. Too
ignorant to understand accounts, the Muslim peasants are
fleeced by the Hindu Sanukars and Muslim Waddars and Khans
in ways shocking to fair minds. The debtor goes on paying
something every year in cash and kind, and yet the debt of
a trifling sum of 10/- or 40/- rupees is not paid "in full"
during a lifetime. Consequently, the father leaves the debt
to his son, and in this way the family remains perpetually
under debt. The entire class of peasants are virtual serfs
of the money-lenders".

The above facts reveal that the money-lending system
squeezed every penny from the peasant along with the interest both
due and undue. As soon as the peasant resorts to usury credit,

The rates were so high that it became quite impossible
for the debtor to repay and it is recorded that only upto
1906, about 60% people had become debtors of Waddari system.
Ibid.


139. In the earlier records, the interest charged by the money-
lenders was not less than 81% (JKA, Review of Ass. Rep. of
6 Tehsils, pp. 11-12).
his small holding falls firmly into the clutches of the money-
lender. It sinks in the process of ruin towards the debt slavery
of the peasantry and their dependents for many years, often for
life, and equally frequently, the payment of the deceased peasants
debt devolves on his relatives for many generations to come and
thus form the debt slavery. It must, however, be mentioned here
that the interest charged was 300% which became dead impossible
for the paperised peasantry to pay which, consequently, led
virtually to the debt slavery. Lamenting on this Bazaz writes:

"Sahukars (money-lenders) are rich people. For a long time
in the past they have been bleeding the poor peasants by
extorting their hard-earned pennies in the shape of interest
on imaginary or genuine debts. Even after having paid 300%
interest, the loan still remains intact and is never written
off. A large number of peasants are born in debt, remain in
debt all their lives, and die in debt."

Such was the state of things during our period of
study which heavily fell upon the peasantry, the majority of
population.

140. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 91/H-75 of 1906.


142. Bazaz, op. cit., p. 163.

143. Ibid.

"I had come across a case of it in the tehsil and
told him that a cultivator had borrowed 12 annas to
buy medicine for his sick father. That was three
years ago and now a decree had been given against him
for 108 rupees." Wakefield, Recollections, pp. 198-199.
CONSEQUENCES OF OPPRESSION:

Imponderment of the Peasantry:

The first and obvious consequence of the over-taxation and begar was that the existing economic stratification of the society, in which the masses lived in an extremely papurized condition, was further reinforced. Writing about the unique type of impoverished condition of Kashmiri peasantry, Lawrence says:

"I have camped at Gwalior territory and have camped in nearly every state of Rajputana, and from the little I have seen, and from what I have read, I feel almost sure that the condition of cultivators in Kashmir is infinitely worse than it is in any other Native state in India."

Since the state and its officials not only robbed his produce but also his free time (which he had from his land), for a Kashmiri peasant his life was a battle for survival, i.e., how to manage two times ordinary meals for himself and his family. Hence it is vain to find him having a proper house to live in except a mud hut in which he and his cattle lived together. He had no worth mentioning household articles save a few earthen pots.

---

144. INA, For. Deitt; K.W; Sec; E; Nos. 106-10, Progs. Feb., 1890; INA, Peasant Position, pp. 4-6; B. E. V. Schonberg writes:

"Nature offers many sources of enjoyment to the inhabitants of this lovely Valley (Kashmir), but the stern spirit of oppressor (revenue official) nips their pleasure."


145. T. Bisco, op. cit., p. 87; Wingate, op. cit., pp. 76-79; Lawrence, op. cit., p. 250.

146. Ibid., "In the villages and city alike the people sleep on mats and straw, bedsteads being unknown... a few earthen vessels for cooking, and earthen jars for storing grain, complete the interior of a Kashmiri house." Lawrence, op. cit., p. 250.
nor a proper dress except a domestically woven woolen cloth which he wore both in summer and winter. The peasant poverty has rightly been summarized by Bazaz in these words:

"The poverty of the Muslim masses is appalling. Dressed in rags which can hardly hide his body and barefooted, a Muslim peasant presents the appearance rather of a starving beggar than of one who fills the coffers of the state. The list of the earthly possessions of a peasant is very brief. Besides the rags he wears, he owns a small house, a few earthen vessels, a wooden box, a couple of mats and of course, a large debt. In most cases they have no bedding to sleep in. During winter, when nights are severely cold in the Valley of Kashmir, they sleep on hay spread on the floor in a part of a room occupied by cattle, which is generally warm."

Notwithstanding this oppression, the peasants could not complain of their grievances to anybody, and if sometimes they did, they were not headed, instead severely punished for this act. For example, some villagers of Bandipur had complained of the exactions of some of the high officials, but instead of redressing their grievances, most of them were drowned in the Wular lake. Not only this, they were sometimes stripped naked by the revenue officials. The oppression and extortion of the peasantry was oft

147. Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 251-52.
149. A Neve, op. cit., pp. 30-31; See also, Mrs. J. C. Murray Ansley, Our Visit to Hindustan, Kashmir and Ladakh, p. 292; Dr. E.F. Neve, Things seen in Kashmir, p. 31.
the extent that, "anyone travelling in Cashmere, remarks how badly all the inhabitants are dressed, the reason being this; if a zumeendar cleans himself, and wears a white pugree, he is instantly accused by his kardar of being rich and is doubly taxed accordingly. So it is the policy of all not to look respectable, to be shabby is the fashion of the place. The people are entirely at the mercy of these men... The reason that Europeans are not allowed to remain here in the winter, is because it is the reason of oppression. What is equally rather more unfortunate was that the given poverty made education a distant luxury for the peasant.

151. A Brickmen, Narrative of A Shooting Excursion, p. 113.

152. As a matter of fact, education is a very recent phenomenon in the rural areas of Kashmir. The condition of the peasantry was so bad that it could not afford this luxury especially when education was not free. The Muslim parents especially peasant class was not in a position to pay the school fees for educating their children. Poverty as a factor in the way of their education was, therefore, "not an excuse, but a real impediment" (JKA. For. & Pol. Deptt; File NO: 23/22-P-1 of 1932). Not only that government did not pay any attention for education the rural masses, but we even find a sympathiser of the peasantry; Lawrence, arguing for educating rural people which according to him could be inimical to the economy of the state (Lawrence, op. cit., p. 229). Out of 1,585 boys on roll in 1891-92, only 233 were Muslims. This backwardness did not improve when we see even in 1931-32, the strength of Muslim teachers. Out of 2,201 teachers only 718 were Muslims and out of 49 Middle School Headmasters, only three were Muslims and out of fifteen Highschool Headmasters, only one was a Muslim (Glancy Commission Report, p. 15). These Muslims too were obviously city dwellers and those coming from Syids and Aalim families of both the urban and rural areas. (Lawrence, op. cit., p. 229); See also, JKA, Ganga Nath Report, pp. 80-90.
Reinforcement of Economic Differentiation
Between the Rural and Urban populations

The land revenue policy of the state also reinforced economic differentiation between the rural and urban people. The maximum produce of the villages was drained away to the urban areas especially summer Capital, Srinagar (the home-town of the revenue appropriators) in terms of land and other revenues. The villages got nothing at the altar of losing the lion's share of their produce, instead it generated further drain of wealth from the villagers when the peasants were forced to dispose of their cattle and other commodities at cheap rates to purchase shali from the appropriators of revenue and the state depots, located in Srinagar for meeting their food demand.

In addition to this, what weighed heavily against the peasants in favour of townspeople was the state policy to fix the land revenue in cash and then convert it into shali whose prices were


154. Mostly the revenue officials lived in Srinagar (Wingate, op. cit., pp. 74-75; M. A. Beg, Agricultural Reforms in J&K State, pp. 25-75, Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 410-11), and when the peasants were deprived of the maximum produce, they had to purchase it back from the state depots at Srinagar. Saif-ud-Din, op. cit., Vol. II, ff. 36 and 44; L. Bowring, Eastern Experience, pp. 85-86; Wingate, op. cit., 58-60; Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 387-88.

155. Since the peasants were robbed of the maximum produce, the remaining part was not sufficient for more than three or four months. For the rest they had to live on vegetables, INA, For. Deptt; Sec; Nos., 239-40, Progs, Jan., 1883; INA, For; Deptt; B; Pol; E; Nos., 52-63, Progs, Oct., 1883; Ganesh Lal, op. cit., p. 32; J. B. Ireland, From Wall Street to Kashmir, pp. 397-98; M. A. Beg, op. cit., pp. 35-36; M. F. Hussain, op. cit., p. 135.
fixed deliberately at very cheap rates. This was a politically motivated policy to silence the effective pressure-group living in the city. In this context it is worth-quoting Wingate:

"He (peasant) is a machine to produce shali for a very large and mostly idle city population. The secret of the cheap shali is because if the price were allowed to rise to its proper level, the whole body of Pandits would compel the palace to yield to their demands." 156

He further writes:

"The ignorant Mohammadan cultivator has not only no one he can call friend, but everyone, whether Hindu or Mohammadan, if any influence is against him, for cheap bread by the sweat of the cultivator's brow is a benefit widely appreciated. The Mohammadan cultivator is compelled to grow shali, and in many years to part with it below the proper market rate, that the city may be content. If the harvest is too little for both, the city must be supplied,

156. Wingate, op. cit., p. 73.

A. Wingate strongly advocated the cause of the poor cultivators for increasing the price of shali. So on the recommendation of the Resident, Haji Mukhtar Shah was accepted to advocate the 'cause of the Muslim peasantry. But to the utter disappointment of Wingate, Mukhtar Shah wrote in his report:

"The shawl trade is gone and all artisans are ruined. If the cultivators are, all at once allowed to sell at any price they please, the artisan classes will have to buy dear and will be still further ruined. Caution must be exercised in introducing any cash settlement so that the price may be kept down." Ibid.

The honest tradesman could not realize that agriculture was more important than the shawl industry.
and is supplied by any force that may be necessary and the cultivator and his children must go without. That is the explanation of the angry discontent that filled the Valley during the famine (1877-79). When I told your Highness in Darbar the price of *shali* must rise with the state of the harvest, and must probably be often higher than rupees two *chilki*, a shiver went round the officials, and Your Highness said you would not dare to raise the price, so great would be the outcry. I can only say that a country cannot go on feeding a semi-idle host at less than cost price and somebody must be a loser. The cultivators have lost much, even the interest to cultivate and now the loss is falling on the state.  

Lawrence was also shocked at this partisan attitude of the state which pampered the city dwellers and subjected the peasants to unceasing exactions:

"The interests of the city have from the earliest times been opposed to the interests of the villages. The city people want grain and other village produce at rates far below the cost of production. 'What the eye does not see the heart does not grieve'— and the authorities saw and heard the city, but the villagers were out of sight and out of mind."  

Since the grain was a state monopoly, the revenue officials' oppression went to that extent that they searched in the hearths of the peasants to see whether they retain any grain or not. Writing about this, Mrs. J. C. Murray Ansley writes:

"The great cold which set in Kashmir so early in the autumn of 1877 did destroy, to a considerable extent, the crops then ripening. The people, however, would still have had enough grain to have enabled them to get on till such time as they had sown and gathered in the spring crops of the following year; but the Hindu officials, or their emissaries, made a house to house visitation, and, ascertaining how much grain each man possessed, they seized it, paying the normal price, the people having afterwards to buy back from them as much grain as they could afford to take at the rate of twenty seers or forty lbs., to the rupee, a rate which would probably average nearly three times the price which these poor people had been paid for the grain thus forcibly taken from them.\(^{159}\)

This policy of feeding the city population at the cost of the poor peasantry was quite detrimental for their econom development. After squeezing the "idle-man's" share, the remainin

---

part, too, was not left with the wretched peasant. The state paid least attention towards this, even during the great famine of 1877-79. Regarding such callous attitude of the Government, Mohammad Yusuf Saraf writes:

"The Government made no effort to alleviate the sufferings of the people by the import of grain, from the Punjab; perhaps it thought that since the victims of famine were Muslims who formed the great majority of the population and had also been reduced to extreme poverty and want by a ruthless and extortionist rule of nearly half a century, it was welcome opportunity to get their (Muslims) majority substantially reduced, if not desiredly converted into a minority. In fact, the callousness of its approach and the extremely condemnable methods it adopted to meet the situation were such which would put any man to shame." 160

Depopulation:

Since maximum produce was snatched away from the peasants, who lived only for a few months on what little was left with them, the peasant faced a critical shortage of food even in normal times, which forced them to take the rotten fruits and vegetables

---

causing epidemics. The situation became much worse when crops failed owing to any natural calamity. In those circumstances food became nectar for the peasants. They had hardly any purchasing power and, therefore, they could not afford to purchase the costly rice of the state depots. Inevitably the peasants became the main targets of famine. It is interesting to note that during the famines it were the peasants who generally perished and that too in large numbers. In this regard J.C.M. Ansley writes:

In 1845, an epidemic of cholera raged for three months with such severity that cloth for shrouds became so scarce that the dead had to be disposed of naked or covered with grass. In 1857-58 also, the cholera raged to December and January and then ceased, but reappeared after three months and prevailed for two months more. In 1867, cholera prevailed for four months and killed thousands of people. Again in 1872, cholera visited from August to December, killing thousands of people. Also in 1857-56, cholera lasted for 13 months, during which thousands of people died and 1879 also witnessed cholera for 40 days killing many people.

First, there did not exist any depot in the villages where from the peasants could purchase grain. All these depots were situated in Srinagar.

Secondly, notwithstanding that the grain trade was a state monopoly but unfortunately the price of the state grain was very high because the state exported it to Punjab. Therefore, not only Wingate and Lawrence in the last decade of the last century pleaded that if at all the state is concerned to check the occurrence of famines, it should stop exporting grain; people also in the early twenties of the present century advocated strongly this.

161. INA, For., Deptt.; Sec. E; Nos. 239-40, Progs., January, 1883; INA, For., Deptt.; Sec. E; Nos. 81-82, Progs., March, 1883, Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 226-27 and 263-64.

In 1845, an epidemic of cholera raged for three months with such severity that cloth for shrouds became so scarce that the dead had to be disposed of naked or covered with grass. In 1857-58 also, the cholera raged to December and January and then ceased, but reappeared after three months and prevailed for two months more. In 1867, cholera prevailed for four months and killed thousands of people. Again in 1872, cholera visited from August to December, killing thousands of people. Also in 1857-56, cholera lasted for 13 months, during which thousands of people died and 1879 also witnessed cholera for 40 days killing many people.

First, there did not exist any depot in the villages where from the peasants could purchase grain. All these depots were situated in Srinagar.

Secondly, notwithstanding that the grain trade was a state monopoly but unfortunately the price of the state grain was very high because the state exported it to Punjab. Therefore, not only Wingate and Lawrence in the last decade of the last century pleaded that if at all the state is concerned to check the occurrence of famines, it should stop exporting grain; people also in the early twenties of the present century advocated strongly this.

162. *First, there did not exist any depot in the villages where from the peasants could purchase grain. All these depots were situated in Srinagar.

163. Secondy, notwithstanding that the grain trade was a state monopoly but unfortunately the price of the state grain was very high because the state exported it to Punjab. Therefore, not only Wingate and Lawrence in the last decade of the last century pleaded that if at all the state is concerned to check the occurrence of famines, it should stop exporting grain; people also in the early twenties of the present century advocated strongly this.


162. IN A, For., Deptt.; Sec. E; Nos. 239-40, Progs., January, 1883; INA, For., Deptt.; Sec. E; Nos. 81-82, Progs., March, 1883, Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 226-27 and 263-64.

163. IN A, For., Deptt.; Sec. E; Nos. 239-40, Progs., January, 1883; INA, For., Deptt.; Sec. E; Nos. 81-82, Progs., March, 1883, Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 226-27 and 263-64.
"During the summer of 1878, the famine seemed almost daily to increase; and a newspaper of 13th August states that "the skeletons of all the inhabitants of a pretty little village nestling at the foot of Gulmapg had lately been discovered in a gorge above, where they had retreated in their endeavour to escape the Maharaja's Chupressies (or policemen), whose business it was to prevent emigration", and also adds that "the Lolab Valley was depopulate and a large extent of the district beyond that became a desert..." 164

The following table gives an account of large-scale mortalities claimed by the famines; and surely except a minuscule number these deaths were heaped upon the peasant society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>Population estimated at 8,00,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824-25</td>
<td>Severe earthquake, followed by cholera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831-33</td>
<td>Severe famine, caused by heavy rain in the autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Population estimated at 2,00,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842-43</td>
<td>Cholera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Cholera</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

165. Wingate, _op. cit._, pp. 52-53.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1859-60</td>
<td>Scarcity owing to short water-supply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Floods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Cholera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Population estimated at 5,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Poor harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877-79</td>
<td>Severe famine caused by heavy rain from the end of September, 1877, followed by cholera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Very good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Very good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884-85</td>
<td>Poor harvest, spring rains too heavy, and sowing retarded. Severe earthquake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Population estimate at 3,000,000 to 4,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus instead of the natural growth of population, it declined and that too so horribly from 8,000,000 to 3,000,000 or 4,000,000 in 1887.

The depopulation of the peasantry was also caused by their large-scale migration to India plains. Though for passing

---

the crosses a "rahdari" (pass) was required, yet the oppressed peasantry managed to escape through the by-passes. And when any famine occurred the state observed leniency and let the people to leave the land for eking out their existence elsewhere in plains. Commenting on this, M. F. Hussain writes in 1930:

"One wonders if the peasant faced with such qureling laws can even be contented and prosperous. It is these problems that compel the peasants to migrate to other states for their livelihood. It is owing to these unjust laws that the dwellers of the paradise on earth have to sweat around in the hot plains outside the Valley and go begging for donkey-work before others."

When some kind of relaxation was given in the "rahdari" rules; many of the peasants seized this opportunity of leaving the Valley and thereby relieved themselves of oppression. According to the Census of 1891, the total population of Kashmir was 8,14,241, out of which 87,545 had

---


168. INA, For. Deptt; Sec; E; Nos. 81-82, Progs, March, 1883; INA, Mr. Fashwa, op. cit., pp. 5-10; Wingate, op. cit., pp. 54 and 78; Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 419-20; F. M. Hussain, op. cit., pp. 135-36. See also, Dr. T. Thomson, Western Himalaya and Tibet, pp. 275 and 286.


170. According to Census of India, 1931, the main factors which accelerated the process of migration were: economic pressure, superior attractions of livelihood, religious persecution, mal-administration, etc. Census, 1931, pp. 109-110.
migrated to the plains\textsuperscript{171} and we even today see flourishing markets of the Kashmiris in Delhi, Gaya, Patna, Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Lucknow, and even as far away as Kathmandu (Nepal)\textsuperscript{172}.

The migration of the peasantry to city was not uncommon where they "added to the population of paupers fed with the help of the state"\textsuperscript{173}. It seems, however, necessary to mention here that the Census, of 1931 has distinguished five kinds of migration like casual, temporary, periodic, semi-permanent and permanent.\textsuperscript{174}

\begin{enumerate}
\begin{quote}
However, Imperial Gazetteer has given the number of migrants outside Kashmir as 1,11,775 who have settled in various parts of India. \textit{Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol}, XV, pp. 37-38; See also, Saraf, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. I, p. 298.
\end{quote}
\item \textbf{Saraf, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. I, p. 298}.
\item \textbf{Lawrence, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 420}.
\item \textbf{Casual or minor migrations took place between the adjacent villages or between the districts. Temporary migrations took place due to journey on business, pilgrimages and the like and the temporary demand for labour. Periodic migrations took place in different tracts at harvest times, and the seasonal movements of pastoral nomads. Semi-Permanent migrations took place when an inhabitant of one place resided and earned living in another, retaining their connections with their own homes and then return back after some time. Lastly the Permanent migrations were those where superior attractions of some other locality or place induced them to settle there permanently. \textit{Census, 1931}, pp. 94-95.}
\end{enumerate}
Forced Migrations:  

Alongside the fact that the oppression forced the peasants to leave the Valley and occasionally to escape to the city to become wage labourers, another interesting, though sad, fact of the oppression was that it led to the unsettled peasant life in Kashmir. The oppression was so severe that it forced the peasant to roam from one place to another in search of relieved conditions. He could not leave the Valley without a pass, but he could abscond to villages under a more lenient assessment or a less rigorous Tehsildar. No wonder, therefore, one of the pre-occupations of the Tehsildar was to entice the runaways, who had fled away in the time of his predecessors. Thus we find a Tehsildar haggling with a brother Tehsildar as to rights over the runaways.

Writing over the wandering disposition of the peasantry which they cultivated on account of oppression, Lawrence writes:

"I cannot impress too clearly on the Council the fact that the cultivators of Kashmir do not deem it a strange or very inconvenient things to leave their village at a
moment's notice... A man who leaves his village, where the revenue is heavy, will with ease find land, a house, a garden plot, and welcome in a village within a ten mile's radius in some other tehsil. I know very few villages in which at the present moment a fugitive could not find an empty house and ample land for the asking.\textsuperscript{179}

It is interesting to note that the number of wandering peasantry was greater than those who settled at a permanent place, Wingate says:

"... the revenue system leaves the cultivator without protection. His one concern is to get enough to eat, and when he fails in one tehsil he betakes himself to another. consequently hereditary occupants are few, and if any proof were wanting of the unsatisfactory condition of agriculture it is the fact that large numbers have only cultivated their present lands for a few years. In a highly fertile valley to find the peasantry roving from village to village is a clear sign that the administration is faulty.\textsuperscript{180}

The over taxation and the dreaded \textit{begar} became instrumental not only for economic degradation but also for the mass migration of the peasantry; which is borne by the following statement:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{179} Ibid., p. 434n.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Wingate, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 78.
\end{itemize}
It was, undoubtedly, the added, unbearable burden of excessive taxation, that left practically nothing with the peasant and, above all, the dread of begar in the Northern areas, with hardly one percent chance of safe return, that generated mass migration, and also, "most of them were bare-footed because they could not even afford the home spun grassy sandals (Pulhour) which their more fortunate bretheren were wearing on the journey. Hardly a few may have had adequate clothes for protection against sun, rain, storms and snow on their long journey. It would be untruthful and an exaggeration to say that the rest were ill-clad because the term itself assumes the existence of clothes, though inadequate; in truth they had hardly any respectable clothes, for, each garment they wore, must have had dozens of patches stitched. One may well visualise a mass of humanity thus sullenly moving towards the Punjab under great weight of emotions on account of having been forced to turn their backs towards their hearths and homes, with their little belongings on their heads, the heart breaking cries of the old, infirm and women on account of hunger, heat, cold and illness, a great majority almost dragging their wearied feet, and above all, hundreds of hungry babies in each caravan, hanging over their backs or sucking the milkless, long dried-up breasts of their mothers.... Thousands must have died on their way and though buried on the way-side, some must have naturally fallen prey to vultures and beasts that frequently route.  

As already mentioned, the peasantry was not allowed to migrate and the passes were guarded by the police and strict orders were issued by the state government even as late as in 1926-27 prohibiting the migration and those who disobeyed were fined and even their private property, if any, was auctioned. The great famine of 1877-79 had compelled the state to abolish the "rahdari" system, though temporarily, and the peasants had flocked towards the plains, which is borne by these words:

"The lifting of the ban witnessed a stampede; it appeared as if a bund had suddenly collapsed, for a sea of humanity, drawn from every town village, was moving towards the snow-clad passes, on their way to the land of hope--the British India", and therefore, "the migration was so extensive that according to the 1891 Census Report of Punjab, 1,11,775 Muslims born in Kashmir were counted as having settled in the Punjab", and what would have been the total number, if the information regarding other parts would have been available.

Emergence of New Landlords:

One of the critical repercussions of the economic and physical exploitation of the peasantry was that it fostered the growth of landlordism in Kashmir by forcing the people to sell

182. JKA, For. & Pol. Deptt; File NO: 34/R-3 of 1927. See also Supra.
their "shadowy rights" in land to some influential persons in lieu of protection he guaranteed to them against the oppression of the state and its officials. Since in the given over-taxation, illegal official exactions and other liabilities (especially begar to which a peasant was subjected to simply because of being a peasant) land was not only worthless but also a botheration for a peasant, the peasant could not take a better advantage of it, other than surrendering his "rights" in his land to someone if he assured protection against his oppressors.

Let us see how the protection from Gilgit begar alone prompted the villagers to dispose of their "rights in land." Eventually this led to the transfer of land from the cultivating to the non-cultivating class:

"The chief thing that breaks down a village is begar, a village will submit any loss or hardship. Two years ago impressed labour was required for Gilgit, and the rumours of the loss of life on the road filled the villagers with alarm. Three villages were sold to a Pandit B. N., an ex-Governor, for sums ranging between Rs. 50/- and Rs. 63/-. The amount of the purchase money was of course ridiculous, the real consideration was exemption from begar. A fourth village was sold to a Hindu held in veneration as an ascetic.


186. Ibid., See also for details the Chapter, Jagir, Chak and Muāfi.
He gave Rs. 50/- for a very fine village, but he obtained from the Wazir Wazarat, an order of exemption from begar. The fifth village was a very large and wealthy one near Baramulla. It was bought by the Tehsildar for Rs. 300/- chilki; and was exempted by his influence from begar. The Tehsildar (B. R.) did not consider it necessary to disburse the Rs. 300/- from his own pocket, deducted the amount from the arrears entered against the village. In as much as the Tehsildar is now the sole person interested in the revenue of the village, the transaction is in every way advantageous to him. He has acquired a fine village for nothing, purchasing it out of state money. This village has not yet been under measurement, and I have not verified the facts on the spot, but the Tehsildar is still in possession, and the transaction is well known on the country-side.  

Gilgit begar was not the only factor which led to the transfer of land from peasants to officials, the illegal exactions and other types of begar contributed no less to this new phenomenon of Kashmir history. To quote Lawrence:

"The other side of begar is also a great trouble to the villagers. It consists of requisitions for village produce, and is a form of purveyance on behalf of officials. Under this system, officials would obtain wood, grass, milk, poultry and grain, blankets and occasional poney, cows and sheep free of cost, and higher officials would built

houses in the city or cultivate waste land through unpaid labour of the villagers. When I commenced work in Kashmir I came across numerous instances of this kind of begar, and in one tehsil I found that three villages had been sold to a recent Hakim-i-Ala for very trivial amounts, giving an average of about Rs. 40/- per village. On making inquiries I found that the villagers were only too glad to part with their then "shadowy rights" in the land, as the purchaser had given them a written order exempting them from all kinds of begar, and the flourishing condition of the cultivators showed that they had made a good though illegal bargain. Many other villages were similarly sold, all for nominal sums, the real consideration being that the villages were to be freed from begar. In one instance a Tehsildar bought a fine village for Rs. 130/- but he did not even go through the form of paying this sum, but excused the villagers Rs. 130/- from their revenue and entered it as an arrear. 188

It should, however, be remembered that the peasantry, in order to save themselves from the dreaded Gilgit begar, who migrated to the lands of these landlords, were not having a silver spoon in their mouth, rather were extremely oppressed by these absentee landlords. 189. Except the Gilgit begar, the peasants

188. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 414.

189. For details, see the Chapter, Jagir, Chak and Muafi.
working in these lands were heavily taxed, many kinds of begar were extorted from them and other tortures were inflicted on them. Lamenting on this, P. N. Bazaz writes:

"I shuddered when I heard the condition of the people living in the Jagirs. The depredations of the Jagirdars are monstrous. There is no law but the will of the Jagirdar. I was told that people may not marry even their daughters against the wishes of the Jagirdars. If the country is to progress, these Jagirs one and all should be abolished root and branch."¹⁹⁰

The Jagirdars took forced labour (begar) in terms of construction of buildings, roads in their estate and even took many commodities from the peasants without giving any compensation to them. Not only this, they also threatened the peasants of eviction from their 'possessions':

"What atrocities the Dogras inflicted on the peasantry after appropriating their lands cannot be adequately described. To have a fair idea of them one must personally meet these peasants on whom these exploiters (landlords) have been thrust. The peasants are told in clear terms to either submit in full faith or else face eviction. Sometimes they are threatened in other ways as well."¹⁹²

Giving a detail of some Jagir villages and their devastation due to high oppression and taxation, a Settlement Officer writes:

"Malik Ahmad Shah of Narwa has completely ruined a large village by his cruelty and rapacity. The Dewans (also Jagirdars) have shown themselves sadly wanting in generosity to the people. Dewan Amar Nath's villages have been in the hands of unscrupulous middlemen for years. Dewan Lachman Des's mothers and thanedars fine people and impound cattle. Blankets are taken at a low valuation. The Sir and Rannu Villagers have continued to petition against the Jagirdars for years, and when the Jagirdar tells me that he intends taking Rs. 10,000/- chilki from Rannu (village) this year I can fully understand the people complaining against such rapacity".

**Decline in Cultivation**

The net result of the oppression and the consequent chronic poverty, depopulation and flight of the peasantry, was that there was a considerable fall in cultivation. The peasant who was fleeced of almost all the produce, had neither sufficient resources to make a proper use of his land, nor on account of famine and epidemic mortalities the number of the peasants was never sufficient to cope with the available land. The situation became grave when the peasants deserted their lands to seek more

---

tolerable mode of existence either in other parts of India or in city and towns of Kashmir. Consequent upon this a considerable area of land fell out of cultivation. This situation caused a considerable decrease in the revenues which is attested to by the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Actual Demand for 252 Villages</th>
<th>Actual Collection for 252 Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880-1887</td>
<td>34,61,904</td>
<td>23,81,962</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wingate gives a picture how the bad administration led to the forcible flight of the peasantry causing tremendous havoc in the agrarian economy of the state:

194. Supra.

195.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Actual Demand for 252 Villages</th>
<th>Actual Collection for 252 Villages</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>3,88,613</td>
<td>3,45,031</td>
<td>Very good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>3,96,274</td>
<td>3,51,547</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>4,23,440</td>
<td>3,53,637</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>4,66,200</td>
<td>2,44,389</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>4,69,701</td>
<td>4,09,562</td>
<td>Poor harvest and earthquake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>4,36,872</td>
<td>1,97,841</td>
<td>Good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>4,41,357</td>
<td>2,31,550</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>4,41,403</td>
<td>2,48,369</td>
<td>-do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34,61,904</td>
<td>23,81,962</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Wingate, op. cit., p. 87, JKA, Lawrence to Revenue Member, Robker, NO: 457 (Persian), dated January 31, 1891; See also, JKA, Lawrence, Ass. Rep. of Inch Nagam, Tehsil, p. 11.
"These 252 villages are scattered over 15 tehsils, and as a specimen of how they have broken down I give an instance. The khewat of the village of Asham was fixed at Rs. 1,275/- . The collections for 1880 and 1881 were Rs. 1,271/- and Rs. 1,411/- . In 1882 the village was sold by auction to a contractor for Rs. 2,095/- . I believe he lasted one or two years and then fled. For 1886 and 1887, the collections were Rs. 553/- and Rs. 782/- . When I saw the village its fine lands were mostly lying unsown and its houses empty. If it is enquired why the old cultivators do not now return it is because the outstanding balance against the village is enormous, and last year I found the Tehsildar trying to secure the entire crops of the miserable few who were left in a vain attempt to reach a sum equal to about one-third of the demand, but with the more likely result of the ensuing complete desertion of the place."

The high oppression naturally forced the people to abandon land, resulting into the decline of cultivation and agriculture. Out of 17.78 lakhs of acres of land measured by the Settlement Department, only a small portion of 9.49 lakhs of acres was then, due to abandonment, under cultivation and the greater part of it, too, was held by the absentee landlords.

The decline in cultivation is testified by the fact that the total land revenue of Kashmir in 1871 was Rs. 27,75,990/- which went on dwindling to Rs. 14,79,839/- in 1893-94. The actual collections of land revenue from 1888 to 1893-94 was as under:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1888-89</td>
<td>Rs. 12,31,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889-90</td>
<td>Rs. 12,55,734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890-91</td>
<td>Rs. 12,48,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-92</td>
<td>Rs. 12,49,614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-93</td>
<td>Rs. 14,06,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893-94</td>
<td>Rs. 14,79,839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overtaxation and illegal exactions also took the heart of the peasants out of cultivation. Realizing that they would be robbed of what they would produce, the peasants adopted a very lukewarm attitude towards cultivation and that too under force. Consequently it proved very inimical to good cultivation. This is also borne out by the following account:

"It is necessary to explain the deeply rooted hatred and distrust which the Mussalman cultivator feels for the Pandits before it is impossible to understand and why the cultivating classes make so little of the fertile, easily irrigated land of Kashmir. At the present movement..."

198. Lawrence, op. cit., pp. 237-39. However, Girdleston has given the amount for 1871 as Rs. 32,10,174. (INA, Girdleston, Memorandum on Kashmir, p. 13).


200. Ibid.

the people are adopting a system of rice cultivation which is inferior to that practised two years ago. Their reason is that they can pay their revenue and obtain rice enough to feed themselves for seven months, and beyond this they are careless, for any surplus would be seized by the officials. They have rooted up orchards of apple trees and other fruit trees, because their orchards attracted the notice of the Pandits. They can graft and bud, but it is rare to find grafted varieties of the apple and pear. They admit that white rice commands the higher price, and that broadcast sowing gives the better results in Kashmir, but they sow red rice, and are giving up broadcast for transplanted rice. They object to trying a better kind of seed for barley and wheat, and the reason they give is that if they produce anything good the Pandits will seize it. 202

The present century gradually paved way for some relieved conditions for the peasantry due to the mass consciousness but more because of the British pressure.  203 After the conferment of occupancy rights in 1895-96 which fixed the land tenure system and then conferment of proprietary rights in 1933 204 some betterment in cultivation took place. The Government also took some measures to better the lot of the peasants. But actually the

202. INA, Peasant Position, p. 4.
203. Supra.
204. See Charter, "Land Ownership"
Peasantry got a sigh of relief only after the termination of our period when Acts like Big Landed Estates Abolition Act of 1950 and the Distressed Debtors Relief Act of 1949 were passed along with the programme of "Land to the tiller" which undoubtedly bettered the lot of the peasant community and increased the cultivation and agricultural production. Prior to 1949, there was no marked increase in agriculture which can be borne by the fact that in 1901-2, the land revenue collection was Rs. 15,26,691/- which hardly increased to Rs. 20,78,358/- in 1915-16 and Rs. 30,01,000/- in 1939-40.

### Peasant Reaction to Oppressions

While studying the oppressive policy of the state and its officials towards the peasantry, an important question immediately strikes one's mind, as to how the peasantry reacted to this oppression? Did they patiently bear all this or they showed an equal and opposite reaction? To be sure, the sources are totally silent about any organized peasant revolt at least.

---


upto 1939 against this oppression. We neither find the peasants taking to streets nor taking up arms to press their demands. The reasons for the absence of any such definite reaction on the part of the peasantry are not difficult to seek. First important factor which came in the way of any organized resistance against the oppression was what may be called the "medieval mentality" which dominated the outlook of every individual, layman and learned both. That is why every Kashmiri considered the ruler the ultimate owner of all that existed in this kingdom and, therefore, the final authority to decide as to how much he reserve for himself and how much he would part with for those who produced it? During the Dogra period the idea that the ruler is the ultimate proprietor gained much currency because they made a full propaganda that they had purchased Kashmir in lieu of


For ages, the peasant had been emasculated. He had developed such traits that made him accept anything as ordained by fate for him. He had lost the courage to rise against the tyranny. He could not help getting fleeced before his very eyes, resulting in losing of all sense of belonging and thus everything appeared futile to him. Such an attitude had been further strengthened by making him to work for others—city dwellers like shawl weavers and absentee landlords and other officials—which gave him the impression that he was a serf working for others.

211. Even the Assessment Reports clearly show that there was a great difference between the revenue system of Kashmir and that of other parts of India. See Ass. Rep. of Ullar-Vihu Tehsil, pp. 3-4.
75,00,000 of rupees. The new ethos which assigned the proprietorship of Kashmir to the person of Maharajas, therefore, prepared the Kashmiri peasant psychologically to act as a coolie and accept the terms and conditions of his landlord. The peasants had no other way but to compromise with the situation. And those who could not just reconcile with the situation ran away.

Second important factor which can be attributed to the absence of any organized revolt was the lack of leadership. The peasant mass, needless to say, was ignorant and, therefore, unable to organise itself. There were, no doubt, some peasants who belonged to such influential and intellectually alert groups like Mugerddams, Pirzadas, Pandits and sikhs who could have provided leadership to the peasants, but it is to be noted that the state silenced them by providing different concessions. Hence instead of organising the peasantry against the state and official oppression, they acted as the strong props of the Government and its machinery.

212. See Supra.
213. See Supra.
214. INA, For. Deptt; Sec; Nos, 87-89, Progs, January, 1853; INA, For. Deptt; Gen. B; Nos, 93-100, Progs, February, 1879.

For instance, during the 1931 uprising in Kashmir, the first of its kind and the beginning of the Freedom Movement in Kashmir, Maulvi Yusuf Shah, Mirwaiz, supported the Government at that time and was ultimately granted a jagir for his loyal tendencies, Bazaz, op. cit., pp, 181-82.
"The Safed-Posh class of villagers, that is the more affluent men, who wear white clothes, do not work, but look on while others toil... Their lives are fairly easy, and they have considerable influence in the villages. They have not much sympathy for the ordinary cultivators, and they are always spoken of in the countryside as Darbari men, who side with the native officials."\(^{215}\)

Lamenting over the lack of union and leadership among the peasantry, Lawrence says:

"Just as the officials are strong by union and by loyalty to one another, so are the Mussalmans weak by want of union and loyalty. In the villages it is common to find the Lambardar working with the Tehsildar against his fellow cultivators, more hated and feared than the Pandit official. It would be hard to imagine the utter want of cohesion there is in a Kashmir village. Each man is for himself, and from two cases which I have seen, I doubt whether even in times of distress a villager can expect much help from his fellows!"\(^{216}\)

---


216. INA, *Peasant Position*, p. 3. Some fact has also been echoed by Winjate in these words:

"This ignorant Mohammadan cultivator has not only no one he calls friend, but everyone, whether Hindu or Mohammadan, of any influence, is against him, for cheap bread by the sweat of the cultivator's brow is a benefit widely appreciated". Winjate, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
It should, however, be noted that it was late in thirteens of the present century, especially after establishing the Kisan Sabha in 1937, when S. M. Abdullah said that "my energies would be now directed towards the villages" that an accepted leadership took the cause of the depressed peasants which becomes clear from the following resolution of National Conference passed in its 2nd Session of Baramulla in 1940:

"... no responsible Government would be acceptable to the nation in which tillers of the soil are not allowed to enjoy the fullest fruits of their labour; for this there can be no other way than those alone should possess and own soil who till it."

Though it is a fact that the peasantry did not, for a long time, take recourse to any uprising or armed resistance against the oppression, it does not mean that it went on braving all this without any reaction. The peasantry reacted very significantly though it was always passive in nature.

First kind of reaction shown by the peasantry was that they refused to pay the heavy assessment. To quote Lawrence:

"The Kashmiri, in spite of his abject condition, is a very obstinate and determined person, and in cases where he considered that the assessment was too high he was steadily declined to pay the excess."
Sometimes the officials resorted to very notorious physical tortures for compelling the peasants to pay the land revenue. And when the officials were cruel enough and compelled the peasants to dispose of their property to pay the revenue demand, the peasants immediately reacted by deserting their lands and migrating to either a lightly assessed area or to the city (to become a wage labourer) or to the Indian plains. "I have explained elsewhere", says Lawrence, "How readily an assami would leave his land and wander to other villages, and have shown that the limit of endurance in a Kashmiri was very defined. Once this limit was passed and the exactions proved too heavy, the Kashmiri would set off with his family or sheep, leaving behind him nothing that he regretted, save perhaps the vegetable plot. This wandering disposition is hard to change, and when I was too high in my assessment the village always threatened me with instant migration." As a matter of fact the oppressive conditions of

220. INA, For. Deptt; Sec; Nos. 172-73, Progs, March, 1894; G. K. L, p. 109; Lawrence, op. cit., p. 420; Younghusband, op. cit., pp. 177-79; Lawrence, The India We Served, p. 128. See also, J. L. K. Jalali, Economics of Foodgrains in Kashmir, p. 38.

221. Lawrence, Valley of Kashmir, p. 420; also, INA, For. Deptt; B; Pol. E; Nos. 52-53, Progs, October, 1883.

222. Ibid.

223. See Supra.

224. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 434
Kashmir, gave to us a migratory peasantry; and it is strange to note that the population of the migratory peasantry was comparatively larger than those who lived a settled life.  

Second important reaction shown by the peasantry to overtaxation was that they refused to cultivate the land and paid least attention towards ensuring a good cultivation. As a matter of fact it was under force that they cultivated their lands. That is why we find that one of the most important duties of a Tehsildar was to visit every village of his tehsil at the time of sowing so that the peasants brought all the land under plough. Doubtless the oppressive system took all heart out of the people and "many villages, formerly famous for special kinds of rice, or for fruits, rather than expose themselves to the constant exactions of the officials, took the cultivating more common kinds of rice and cut down their fruit thees." In a given situation Wingate was also not surprised to find the fields of a peasant "fallow or full of weeds and manure and water neglected."  

225. A. Wingate, in this context writes:

"...the revenue system leaves the cultivator without protection. His one concern is to get enough to eat, and when he fails in one tehsil he betakes himself to another. Consequently, hereditary occupants are few, and if any proof were wanting of the unsatisfactory condition of agriculture it is the fact that large numbers have only cultivated their present lands for a few years. In a highly fertile Valley to find the peasantry roving from village to village is a clear sign that the administration is faulty." Wingate, op. cit., p. 78.

226. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 420.

227. Ibid., p. 415.

228. Wingate, op. cit., p. 73.
Third important reaction shown by the peasantry was that a large number of them deserted the Khalsa land and migrated to Chak, Jagir, and muafî lands, where oppression was lesser than that on the Khalsa lands. The peasants also preferred to sell their "shadowy rights" in land to some influential persons so that they would be protected from oppression.

It was late in present century that some administrative laws were passed by the Government under the pressure of the British Government that the condition of the peasantry starting improving and the peasantry started thinking in terms of reaction of the modern nature. The Freedom Movement played a vital role in rousing the peasantry from the deep slumber and we see, for the first time, in the beginning of thirtees of the present century that the peasants started "no Rent Movement", especially in Handwara Tehsil and in the Jagir villages of Dewan Badri Nath. Last but not least, the freedom movement of Kashmir, which started from 1930, became a mass movement only because of the whole-hearted cooperation and support of the peasantry. And that why till yester-years, National Conference had very deep roots in the rural areas and all the elders of the Valley regarded Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah as a massiah and was literally worshipped by them, the following pages will testify this fact.

229. Supra, fn. 25-30.
230. INA, Peasant Position, pp. 1-5; INA, For Deptt; K.W; Sec; E; Nos. 106-10, Progs, Feb., 1890.
231. The administrative laws, such as the Tenancy Act, Agriculturist's Relief Regulation, Kar-i-Sarkar Bill, Land Alienation Act, Right of Prior Purchase and Pre-emption Act, etc., were passed which gave a great relief to the peasants.
State Policy To Improve the Condition of Peasantry:

Needless to repeat, the biggest factor responsible for the papurised condition of the peasantry was the high pitch of revenue demand, added with illegal taxes. Though the peasantry had to pay land revenue at the rate of 50%, the other taxes levied by the state and its officials amounted to not less than 25%, leaving hardly 25% with the cultivator. However, it was first reduced to 38% and subsequently then to 25% by Maharaja Hari Singh. As we have already thrown a detailed light on the land revenue and other taxes, it is, therefore, suffice to say that many steps were taken during the second quarter of the present century, especially after 1930, that the peasant's economic condition began to stabilise, though slowly and gradually.

The first important step, besides reducing the revenue demand, taken by the state was the advancement of loans (both in kind and cash) to the peasants under the name of the Taccavi loans for the purchase of seeds, cattle, sinking of wells and for other land improvements. The taccavi loans were re-payable

233. See Chapter, Agrarian Taxes.

234. Ibid.

along with the land revenue demand in half yearly instalments. The following table shows the *taccavi* loans advanced by the Government from time to time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grain advanced valuing Rupess.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1904-5</td>
<td>Rs. 14,792/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1911-12</td>
<td>Rs. 10,298/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>Rs. 3,372/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>Rs. 2,350/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>Rs. 5,217/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>Rs. 37,750/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grain purchase advances, introduced in 1907, was given to the cultivators if their crops were damaged by some natural calamities. For instance, grain valuing Rs. one lakh was advanced as *taccavi* loan during the year 1889-90 to the Kashmiri peasantry because of the floods and epidemics. Likewise, 86,666 kharwars of *shalli* were advanced to the Zamindars during the year 1938-39. Besides these advances, the state also passed the suspension and Remission Rules and the Alluvion and Diluvion Rules.

---


237. The table has been prepared after consulting the Administration Reports of Jammu and Kashmir State from 1904-5 to 1939-40.

238. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 12/X-159 of 1907; JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 17 of 1918.


both similar to Punjab Rules—according to these, the revenue was suspended or remitted during the natural calamities like fire, flood, draught, epidemics, etc., and revenue remitted when an estate or a part thereof was washed away by floods. It should, however, be noted that the grant of such loans was a lengthy process, and out of reach of a common peasant. First, the Patwari of the village was required to inspect carefully the damaged crops and then send his statement to the Girdawar, Qanungo, Naib Tehsildar and Tehsildar, who, in turn sent their report to the Hakim-i-Ala of the province after a good deal of investigation. The Hakim-i-Ala, after verification, despatched the statement to the Maharaja who was the final authority in granting such advances. Also, the taccavi loans benefitted only a few cultivators. It was not an aid, but recoverable loan and the lands or homes of the borrower were hypothecated to the state. The process of "grain purchase advance", discussed above, also was so lengthy and labourious that it was almost impossible for a peasant to get benefit from this and thus mostly depended on the money-lenders for the money they required.

241. Ibid., p. 47.
243. Ibid.
245. Supra, fn. 242.
The most oppressive institution which broke the back of the peasantry was the institution of begar in Kashmir. It was because of this that the people not only sold their "shadowy rights" in land but also migrated to plains so as to save themselves from this dreaded work. When Maharaja Pratap Singh was deposed in 1889\textsuperscript{247}, and a Council consisting of five members was constituted, comprising of the two brothers of Pratap Singh—Raja Amar Singh and Raja Ram Singh and two officers from British India—Raja Suraj Koul and Mr. Bhag Ram and the Resident in Kashmir was the final "refer\'ee" with powers to reject any decision taken by the Council, or to sanction any appointment or approve of any item of expenditure\textsuperscript{248}.

The Council, for the first two years, did nothing to mitigate the cruel impact of begar but the first step taken in this regard was initiated in 1891\textsuperscript{249}, when the task to deal with begar was entrusted to R. L. Logan\textsuperscript{250}, who after carefully analysing the begar system, submitted a report to the Maharaja. His proposals included that all cultivators whether cultivating the state land or of Dharmarth Trust, be held liable to begar and that the

\textsuperscript{247} Supra, fn. 235.

\textsuperscript{248} JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 1 of 1889; J.L.K. Jalali, Economics of Foodgrains in Kashmir, pp. 28-29.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., Also, JKA, Grain Control in Kashmir, pp. 1-17.

\textsuperscript{250} JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 38 of 1891.
inhabitants of Srinagar also take fair share of begar. However, he exempted the Brahmans from begar. He also proposed for preparation of a register for each village showing the number of men available for begar, their names and the number of carriage animals in each village and their owners and the Settlement Department might state as to how many men and ponies were to be supplied in each quarter of the year without causing inconvenience to the agricultural operations. In other words, Logan suggested the fair distribution of begar among all the inhabitants of Kashmir and also advocated for its continuance with some modifications.

In 1891, a Department known as Civil Transport Department to regulate the begar system was established, the chief object being to abolish the begar and impose an additional cess on land revenue to organize a paid establishment for working the transport system. In the meanwhile the officials also were forbade to purchase villages on small sums on the promise of exempting them.


252. Ibid., see also, Andrew Wilson, The Abode of Snow, pp. 287-88; Capt. Knight, The Diary of A Pedestrian, pp. 75-77.

253. Ibid., also, M. Elmslie and Thomson, Seedtime in Kashmir, p. 212; J. B. Ireland, op. cit., pp. 396-98; Lucullus, Kashmir Raj, pp. 96-98.

254. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File No: 38 of 1891.

255. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File No: 34 of 1891.
The Transport Department was provided with 1,000 coolies from Kashmir Valley on the remuneration of Rs. 5/6/- per month. It was provided that no coolie will be engaged for begar, unless:

1. he had attained the age of 18 years;
2. he was physically strong and fit for begar;
3. he enters the service willingly; and
4. he produces a good conduct certificate from the Tehsildar.

W. R. Lawrence was then sought opinion on the issue of begar and the civil Transport Department. He approved of its permanent establishment but opposed for the complete abolition of begar system on the plea that time had "not yet come" in Kashmir to abolish begar. Specifying the forms of begar, he reported that there remained only three types of begar in Kashmir as under:

1. Transportation of the camps of the Maharaja and the Royal family;
2. Transportation for European visitors and others, and
3. Labour required for improvement of irrigation and communication.

However, he did not deny the possibility of abolition of begar entirely but thought that Kashmir had not yet reached that stage when it would be abolished and ratified by imposing of

257. *Supra*, fn. 255.
258. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 12 of 1892.
259. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 34 of 1891.
the opinion of Lawrence and argued that the, "abolition of begar was a question of time", and, therefore, "the maintenance of the time-honoured begar custom was inevitable until some effective measures were taken to replace it" and considered that the, "establishment of the state Transport Department cannot effectively work in place of begar". In the meanwhile, system of farming out begar to Hanjis was formed out and after completion of their contracts, they were given exemption certificates from begar by the state.

In 1894, the Maharaja granted full proprietary rights over waste lands, in favour of Dogra Rajputs, on moderate terms including absolute exemption from begar. In 1898, new rules were framed to improve the begar system. The Revenue member in concurrence with the Resident's approval exempted the Markabens employed on the Gilgit transport service for one month against a single trip and for 1½ month for double trip to Gilgit and back and the parwans of exemption were issued by the Hakim-i-Ala.

260. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 12 of 1893.
262. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 11 of 1893.
In 1900, bekar was abolished in principle but taken in the event of emergency, as echoed by Revenue Member in these words, "I have the honour to report for the information of the Resident in Kashmir that Kar-i-begar system has long been abolished from the state, but forced paid labour in cases of emergency is taken from all Zemindars more or less." It should, however, be noted that, says Raja Amar Singh, Vice-President of the State Council, that, "the Kashmiri coolies are habitually very timid and would not be willing to go out of their country unless forced."

It should be noted that in spite of some measures taken with regard to abolition of bekar, the evils of it were still in existence. The Revenue officials played a great role in keeping the bekar system operative for their selfish ends and thus all the measures and steps of the state were all in vain.

In 1906, a Conference was convened by the Revenue Member to discuss the bekar problem and varied views were expressed in this regard. Consequent upon which, in 1910, the Governor of Jammu brought the evils of the bekar to the notice of the state Council in which he informed that the bekaris were either not paid at all or paid in part only; and were paid only for the days when they were actually under load and nothing was

265. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 13/L-227 of 1900; JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 13/L-27 of 1900.
266. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 94/P-1 of 1904.
267. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 77/P-100 of 1906.
paid for the days they took in coming from home and waiting in Tehsil headquarters and were also not paid during halts. These evils caused demoralization in the labouring class which was always afraid of being not paid their dues, resulting in the lack of interest in the work. In fact, the picture presented by the Governor attracted the serious attention of all the members of the state Council and decisions were taken to bring moderation in the system of forced paid labour and the fixation of rates per stage and mode of payment was made clear, including those who were taken as begaris on the Srinagar-Banihal Road and Anantnag-Verinag road for official move.

This does not, however, mean that the begaris (coolies) were paid in full before their sweat become dry, instead they had to wait for the payment of mere one or two annas for one or two years, resulting in that the money hardly reached their pockets at all. In 1913, therefore, the Revenue Member suggested strongly to entrust the work of payment to the concerned Tehsildars and Lambardars especially with regard to road construction. But the corrupt officials like Lambardars tried to pocket a fair share or whole of the payment paid by the state. In the meanwhile, in

269. Ibid.
270. Ibid.
271. Ibid.
272. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 213/P-106 of 1913.
273. Ibid.
274. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 203 of 1913.
1913, the Resident of Kashmir while stressing on the necessity of forced labour suggested that the Naib-Tehsildars at Bandipore, Gurez and Astore, and the Tehsildar at Gilgit be provided with funds of Rs. 100/- each for the cash payment to the beqaris, which was accepted by the Maharaja, thus doing away with the hold of Lambardars in this regard.

In 1914, another step was taken with regard to begar that the maintenance of a permanent gang of coolies on village road repair works was made and a fund of Rs. 1,000/- was reserved with Wazir-i-Wazarat and Rs. 3,000/- with the Governor for the purpose.

In 1916, the Governor made some recommendations, put forward by the Revenue Member to the Maharaja for sanction in order to enable the local revenue officers to manage the begar affairs without giving rise to complaints. The Governor, in consultation with Settlement Commissioner, recommended for exemption from begar certain classes of people such as Pundits, Pirzadas, Syids, Sikhs, domestic servants of high officials, privileged classes, Jagirdars, Lambardars, Zaildars, Patwaris, village menials and Chowkidars, persons attached to religious institutions like Imams, Pujaris.

275. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 213/P-106 of 1913.
276. Supra, fn. 274.
277. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 64/P-31 of 1914.
278. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 64/P-31 of 1914.
Bhais and shrine khadims, aged or infirm males, females, minors and others physically unfit persons rendering special service to Maharaja's household, Kashtkars and Chakdars. 279

In 1917, another step with regard to beqar was taken when rules were framed for registration of coolies for their seasonal employment of visitors and officials for manual work under new name of "Kashmiri Servants" 280 and were registered under two heads, viz., permanent coolies, and daily or monthly labourers who were issued badges by the Government. 281 All this should not mislead us that the beqar came to an end through these measures and the peasantry relieved of this. We have clear evidences that beqar was extorted even after these "so called" relief measures. For instance, the Zamindars of Pahalgam illapa were forced to take supplies to the Amar Nath Cave even as late as 1918. 282

In 1920, an article of Fazal Dad, teacher was published in the Bande Mataram, Lahore, on 15th July, 1920 regarding the impressed labour taken in Kashmir which raised a hue and cry in the outside state circles. The state, therefore, took an important step in 1920 to abolish beqar and decided to grant exemption to a greater number of people. Persons in the state

279. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 155/P-62 of 1916.
280. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 69 of 1917.
281. Ibid.
283. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 72/C-57 of 1920.
government. Service, retired servants on pensions, holders of war-medals, members of the families of Lambardars, Chowkidars, Takaviders, scout corps, non-commissioned officers of army, shopkeepers, blacksmiths, religious leaders, walis (men to look after the khul) carpenters, dooms, kannis, Rajas, members of respectable families, servants of European and Indian gazetted officers, aged men, women, children and disabled persons, all were exempted from begar. Now the impressment of labour was restricted only to the Zamindars during emergency. In the same year, All India Kashmir Muslim Conference passed a resolution that "... this Conference views with deep regret the system of begar yet in vogue in the state... and it is appealed to the Darbar to put an immediate end to this relic of barbarism." To remove this "misunderstanding" of the All India Kashmir Muslim Conference, the Revenue Member tried to explain the nature and meaning of begar prevalent in Kashmir by stating that, "the term begar under the existing rules means only the liability of supply of labour on full wages to meet the requirements of the administration. Apparently, therefore, the term begar as understood and acted upon by the state authorities is misinterpreted by the General public and taken to be a sort of hardship on these from whom begar is taken."

285. Ibid.
286. INA, For. & Pol. Gp; (OER) NO: 2/Misc-140 of 1920.
287. JKA, Pol. & Gen. Deptt; File NO: 72/C-57 of 1920.
In 1925-26, the word kar-i-begar was replaced by the word kar-i-sarkar and the forced labour extorted by the visitors and private persons was prohibited. In 1926, the Revenue member wrote that, "the system of begar wherever it is in force must no doubt be troublesome to the public and should be discouraged as much as possible." It clearly indicates that the system of forced labour was still in vogue in Kashmir. In the same year, new rules were formed to regulate the kar-i-sarkar in Kashmir, which in no way, differed from those formed in 1916. In the meanwhile, in 1926, the League of Nations convened a Conference, known as slavey convention, which strongly stressed on the prohibition of forced labour of any kind and the copies of the Draft were distributed among the Residents through the Foreign and Political Department, Government of India. In the convention, the term "forced or compulsory labour" meant "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily."

In spite of all this, the Revenue officials extorted begar from the villagers without paying them a single penny, though the rules were totally against this. When in 1931, a mass revolt took place, a Commission was set up to look into the

290. Ibid.
291. Ibid.
292. Ibid.
grievances of the people. The commission recommended that, "this practice (of unpaid labour), wherever it can be found to exist, should be very sternly discouraged. It is essential that the orders issued should be strictly observed, and superior officers should make it their business to see that their subordinates do not offend in this matter". Consequently, the Maharaja made strict orders that, "all officers must make it their duty to see that payment is made in full for services rendered.... The provision of free supplies should in no case be allowed, and higher officials when they go on tour should investigate any complaints that may be forthcoming."

In 1935, new rules were framed for kar-i-sarkar by the Jammu and Kashmir state Assembly (Praja Sabha) and a Bill known as kar-i-sarkar Bill passed because, "His Highness Government has declared the removal of begar from the state Territory but the rules now being observed while exacting kar-i-sarkar from the people are nothing but a copy of Rules of begar. Consequently, many respectable gentlemen suffer and their services are being exacted without their consent which is reverse to the intention of the Government." Therefore, it was passed that, "whenever a Government servant is found to have infringed any of the provisions

294. Ibid.
of the Regulation or rules made thereunder, an enquiry shall be made by an officer authorized in this behalf by the Government under rules and such officer may, on the infringement being proved, inflict on him a fine not exceeding Rs. 50/-.

In 1939, new rules enhancing the rates of impressed labour were made by the Governor of Kashmir but these hardly changed the nature of beqar in Kashmir. It must, however, be remembered that though beqar was totally abolished by the state only in theory, it, however, continued in practice in its full swing and vigour till the end of Dogra Rule in 1947. It was after independence that the system of beqar was abolished in toto or in all its forms.

Like beqar, the rural indebtedness also remained a bleak feature in the agrarian structure under Dogras; one of the basic causes of the heart-rending poverty of the peasantry. The sahukars, Waddars, Bagals, Wasis, taking advantage of the ignorance and helplessness of the poor peasantry, reduced them to penury and charged them at highest possible compound rates of interest.

297. Ibid.,
298. JKA, For. & Pol. Deptt; File NO: 133/G1-79 of 1939.
300. Bazaz says that the peasantry after paying 300% interest on their debt to the sahukars, their debt remained the same. Ibid., p. 163. See also Census, 1931, pp. 222-23.
The debt would get accumulated year after year and the "incomplete and haphazard non-official enquiries show that more than 70% of the people living in the villages are under debt."301 and the "entire class of peasants are virtual serfs of the money-lenders".302 There was no escape from such a situation.

The state Government took some steps to relieve the peasantry from the evils of indebtedness. Before throwing a detailed light on the measures taken by the government with regard to rural indebtedness, it seems necessary to have a bird's eye on the causes which compelled the peasantry to take debts from the money-lenders. The basic cause of the rural indebtedness was the extreme poverty of the peasantry. As already discussed in the previous chapter how the state government imposed heavy land taxes on the peasantry, in addition to heavy land revenue demand. Then the illegal exactions made by the revenue officials which really broke the back of the peasantry303 and thus forced them to take loans from money-lenders to purchase seeds, ploughs, foodstuffs, etc. Secondly the natural calamities which visited the Valley during the first three quarters of the Dogra-rule; resulting in enormous sufferings to more than 90% of the population engaged in agriculture.304

301. Ibid., p. 253; See also, JKA, Agricultural Indebtedness in India, pp. 107-11.
302. Ibid., p. 254.
303. Ibid., p. 254.
304. For details see Chapter, Agrarian Taxes.
mainly due to floods, famines and epidemics, causing a great
men and material loss to the people. From 1850-1925 only, the
natural calamities accounted for about 1,61,784 human lives, about
17,898 cattle and about 18,143 houses. Such losses obviously
created economic crisis and the starving peasantry had no other
alternative but to take more and more advances from the money-
lenders at the exorbitant rate of interest.

The state government, therefore, tried to relieve the
masses from the clutches of money-lenders, but the half-hearted
measures were a mere drop in the ocean. It seems that the Dogras
considered these calamities as the "Almighty's curse on people"
and, therefore, used to distribute something in "charity" to the
starving population and these so-called benevolent measures were
extolled to the skies in official reports.

In 1925, in order to restrain the unbridled money-lenders,
Agriculturist's Relief Regulation was passed by M. Hari Singh—the
law which had not been passed even in the British India. According
to this Regulation a debtor could bring his creditor
to the court for settlement of accounts which could disallow the
excess interest, the prescribed limit being given, which was not
to exceed 50% of the capital. The court could also fix the

305. Ibid.
306. For full details, see J. S. Dev. Natural Calamities in
J&K State, pp. 20-142.
instalments according to reasonable capacity of the debtor and "special allans were issued declaring agricultural implements, seeds, etc., as non-attachable for redemption of decrees by civil courts". After a few years, one more regulation was passed according to which about 17 lakhs of rupees were to be paid to debtors in small instalments of about Rs. 30/- or so over a number of years. Moreover, all rural debt had to be referred to special shahi benches within a stipulated period after which it could be declared as void.

In 1933, the Aid to Agriculturists and the Land Improvement Act, were passed according to these, the peasants could secure loans on simple interest of Rs. 6% per annum and the Governor of Kashmir was authorized to propose an amount required for loans under these laws for land improvement and relief to the distressed. However, during the clamity, the loans were remitted. Then the Land Alienation and Right of Prior Purchase Acts were passed which prevented the transfer of land from the agriculturists to the non-agriculturists including the money-lenders as well.

310. Ibid. Also, JKA, A Note on J&K State, p. 31.
312. Ibid., pp. 48-49.
313. Ibid.
314. Ibid.
It should, however, be noted that these half-hearted measures proved futile. The money-lenders-cum-landlords could easily evade these laws since there were many loopholes in them. While the money-lender could afford to seek the services of lawyers, the peasants were unable to bear the heavy expenses of litigation. Most important was the question of demand and supply; the peasant was forced to borrow so as to cultivate and pay to the state. He had to approach the money-lender—virtually the only agency to supply cash for his needs. In these circumstances, even the best legislation would fail to check the growth of indebtedness, alienation of land to the money-lender, and the greater increase in the number of landless labourers.315

Besides, the state took one more step in 1913 when the Cooperative Credit Societies and the Cooperative Banks were established.316 In 1914, there were 336 Cooperative societies and Cooperative Banks in the Kashmir province.317 Due to the First World War (1914-1918), the prices of essential commodities rose considerably and the shopkeepers and sahukars began profiting.

315. At the close of the Dogra rule, there were three lakh landless cultivators (labourers) cultivating the land of others. M. Afzal Beg, Agricultural Reforms in Kashmir, pp. 51-53. See also, JKA, Ministry of Revenue, J&K Government, Jagirs, Musfis and Mukarraries.


So, in order to save the people from these shahukars and waddars, the Cooperative shops were set-up in several towns.\(^{319}\) In 1922, the Cooperative Societies were divided into two heads:\(^{320}\)

a) **Agricultural Societies;** and

b) **Non-agricultural Societies.**

The Agricultural Societies used to advance credit to their members for the purchase of cattle, payment of land revenue demand, food stuffs, bullocks, etc.\(^{321}\) while the non-agricultural societies used to advance credit to the artisans, traders and labourers\(^{322}\). In 1923, the administrative change in the Cooperative Societies took place when the Revenue Member was entrusted the general administrative control of the societies with the Registrar as his subordinate and all this was done because of the increased volume of the work of these Cooperative Societies\(^{323}\).

Notwithstanding the tall claims of the government, it remains a fact that the cooperative Credit Societies failed to render any service to the general peasantry. The poor peasant, badly in need of loan, was never enrolled as a member of the society on account of his poverty. Moreover, the majority of

---


peasantry living in far flung areas never heard of the existence of these societies. The involvement of the state machinery in matter of money advances, by all available accounts, was only nominal at best and the money-lenders, therefore, continued the exploitation of the poor and needy peasantry as ever as it did.

Before concluding, it seems necessary to throw light on the role and contribution of the Freedom Movement (1931-1947) in ameliorating the distressed condition of the peasantry which really made S. M. Abdullah as the massiah of the peasantry. How the Movement came to existence in 1931 is beyond our discussion here but the fact remains that at the time of accession of Maharaja Hari Singh to the gaddhi of Kashmir in 1925, the peasantry was in such a pathetic condition that a spontaneous revolt could not have been ruled out at any moment. But this could be done by a very conscious and mature leadership wedded to the cause of the poor multitudes living in appalling poverty, 90% of whom were Muslim peasants. For centuries, especially during Dogras, they had been exploited under a cruel feudal system aided and abetted by the Hindu bureaucracy. There was certainly an urge for a Bastile spirit in Kashmir which did come later when the progressive and politically conscious young elements came forward and took the leadership of the movement and presented the revolutionary programme of New Kashmir, challenged the Treaty of Amritsar and asked the Dogra Maharaja to quit.
The condition of the general masses became so abject that Sir Albion Benerji, Foreign and Political Minister, resigned in protest and presented the genuine case of the poverty striken population living in villages. On 15th March, 1929, he said:

"Jammu and Kashmir state is labouring under many disadvantages, with a large Mohammadan population absolutely illiterate, labouring under poverty and very low economic conditions of living in the villages and practically governed like dumb driven cattle... There is hardly any public opinion in the state."

In 1930, Reading Room Party was formed which on 19th October, 1931 submitted a Memorial of demands to the Maharaja, the main being concerned with fundamental rights, constitution of Legislature and Executive, local self-government, judiciary, revenue and services and an appendix enclosed demanding the grant of proprietary rights in land, abolition of corruption among revenue officials, reduction of grazing tax etc.

The Memorial of Demands, however, reveal that they did not demand anything for the peasantry as such in the Memorial itself. Even in the appendix, there was no reference regarding the begar and rural indebtedness which had broken the back of the poor.


The signatories of the Memorial were: (i) Mirwaiz Ahmad-ullah Hamdani, (ii) Mirwaiz Mohammad Yusuf Shah, (iii) Syed Hassan Shah Jalali, (iv) Saad-ud-Din Shaul, and (v) Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah.
which mass involvement was seen for the first time, the government appointed a Commission under B. J. Glancy to look into the grievances of the people in November, 1931 which submitted its report in 1932, the main concessions for peasantry of Kashmir contained in the Report were as under:

1. Proprietary rights in respect of lands in which the ownership was held by the state and occupancy rights were enjoyed by private persons, be given to them.

2. Discontinuance of the recovery of malikana, charging of nazrana at moderate rates instead of malikana.

3. No restriction be imposed on the cutting of walnut trees growing on the lands of agriculturists. Assessment imposed on such trees be cancelled when it is removed. Preference be given to landholders on whose land mulberry trees are standing when seed is distributed by Sericulture Department. Chinar trees be left to the discretion of Tehsildars, who be given powers in this regard.

4. Zamindars be given full benefit of the concessions to which they are entitled with regard to the timber of forests.

5. Relief with regard to grazing, where demand is heavy, be proposed by the Revenue Minister.

6. In no case should the interests of Zamindars suffer from the assignment of land to other persons in Jagirs and Chaks.

7. If agricultural lands were acquired by the government, the depressed be given alternative lands as far as possible practically.

8. Revenue Minister may examine the sale of land Legislation in relation to Land Alienation Act of Punjab and make recommendations.

9. The development of Cooperative credit system and consolidation of holdings be given special attention.

10. In case of kar-i-sarkar, all officers must ensure payments for the services rendered.

The Glancy Commission had left much to the discretion of the Revenue Minister which caused, for some-time, delay in implementing them-like the above mentioned Memorial, the Commission also did not touch the tenancy problem and rural indebtedness. In the meanwhile, the Freedom Movement started firmly with the establishment of All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in the beginning of 1932, under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The next year in 1933, proprietary rights were conferred on occupancy peasants after the last instalment of nazrana had been paid.\(^\text{327}\) At the same time, in order to safeguard the peasants from the adverse effects of giving them proprietary rights along with the right of sale and mortgage, Land Alienation Act of 1933 was passed, followed by Right of Prior Purchase Act, imposing restrictions on the alienation of land beyond 25% of his holding for the first ten years and also laid restriction on transfer of land to non-agriculturists.\(^\text{328}\) This should not misled us that there

\(^{327}\) See Supra, Chapter, Land Ownership.

\(^{328}\) See Supra, Chapter, Jegir, Chak and Muafi.
was no transfer of land at all after these laws. The fact remains that sales and mortgages did take place; for he would never be able to clear the loans which used to get piled up due to heavy interest. Only in one year, the mortgages increased from 3,610 acres to 12,183 acres and sales from 9,208 acres to 21,499 acres. 329

So far as role of Muslim Conference with regard to peasantry was concerned, it was equal to nothing. It had, more or less, become the mouth piece of the Muslim beauracracy and mostly demanded the appointment of Muslim officials in place of Hindu officials, as recommended by the Glancy Commission. This attitude disillusioned some young men who realized that getting of a few official positions did not help the cause of the people in general. Moreover, the Muslims had turned more oppressive than the Hindus causing a great resentment. "Imagine the bewilderment of a Muslim leader when Muslim peasants in a village demanded the reversion of a transferred Hindu official in place of a hated Muslim. This happened not at one place and at one time, but on several occasions at many places." 330

It was for the first time when the Kissan Sabha was formed in October, 1937 that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, while addressing its first meeting on 29th October, 1937 at Hyderpora (Srinagar), said, "My energies would be now directed towards the

which was a confession of the fact that till then he had never attempted seriously to organize peasantry in Kashmir. When the Muslim Conference was changed into National Conference in 1939, though under the influence of communist ideology, it now started thinking in terms of emancipation of peasantry from poverty and distress. On 28th September, 1940, at Baramullah, various resolutions were passed, among which one said, "... no responsible government would be acceptable to the nation in which tillers of the soil are not allowed to enjoy the fullest fruits of their labour; for this there can be no other way than those alone should possess and own soil who till it." In one more resolution, demand was made to introduce the principle of progression in land revenue system, exemption from tax of the means of subsistence, charging of lower rates of revenue and cancellation of all rural indebtedness.

Nothing substantial was done for the suffering peasantry till the appointment of Royal Commission under Gangā Nath in 1944, which provided a golden chance for National Conference to vindicate the long cherished desire of the peasantry in the form of a draft of memoranda, known as Naya Kashmir Manifesto, which was drafted

333. *Ibid.*,
by B. P. L. Bedi, containing a Worker's Charter, a Woman's charter, a Peasant's Charter and so on and it was the commitment made in the Peasant's charter which ultimately liberated the peasantry from the age-old slavery and penury. The Peasant's charter as laid down in Naya Kashmir Manifesto reads as under:

1. Every peasant had a right to work on the land unless he is provided with alternative and congenial work on equal conditions.

2. All land which at present belongs to the landlords will revert to the peasant, when social parasitism is abolished.

   During the transition, before planned economy can come into full swing, there should be a sharply progressive system of taxation on all unearned land incomes. Such taxation shall allow no exemptions. During the intermediary period before the final abolition of exploiting landlord, his profits from the land shall be rigorously curtailed and a strict upper income limit fixed.

3. Every peasant family will be guaranteed a higher standard of living in accordance with the national norm.

4. The right of the peasant to maintenance from village produce will be recognized as the first claim on it.

5. All feudal dues, levies and forced labour to be completely abolished.

334. S. M. Abdullah, Aatish-i-Chinar, p. 300.

6. Rural indebtedness has been the milestone of the peasantry of the state. The peasant must be made completely debt free, wherever the borrower has paid off original amount, there shall be no further payment of interest. In the planned economy the provision of agricultural credit will be the task of the state.

7. The peasant, in common with all other workers of the state, is entitled to all the benefits of social insurance.

8. The peasant in a planned economy will be protected against famine, flood, frost crop pests, fire and cattle or animal disease.

9. The peasant shall have the benefits of modern scientific research applied to:
   a) Social problem;
   b) Planning of crops;
   c) Production of green, bone and synthetic problems;
   d) Irrigation development problems;
   e) Drainage facilities against water-logging, stagnant water problems including anti-malarial campaigns, protection on village basis against the evils of a polluted water supply;
   f) Anti-erosion measures;
   g) Labour-saving agricultural implements and machines;
   h) Agricultural methods and efficiency to be taught to him through a net-work of teaching facilities, headed by agricultural experts. Special emphasis to be laid on quality production and grading.
   i) Cooperative packing, storing and refrigeration facilities in state ware-houses and barns to prevent wastage of food crops.
   j) Keeping and breeding of domestic animals;
   k) Poultry farming;
   l) Improved types of fodder; and,
   m) Village sanitation.

10. Cheap and speedy transport facilities to be provided for all peasants.

11. The peasant shall be provided with Cooperative marketing facilities to eliminate wastage of labour power.
12. The peasant shall be ensured the benefits of local forest products and freedom from harrassment by forest officials.

13. The peasant shall have the right to free medical and nursing facilities under the plan.

14. The peasant has a right to a clean, weather, proof and healthy home in a planned village with pure drinking water supply.

15. The peasant has the right to recreation, based on a village hall as an expression of a common village life, provided with a radio and facilities for indoor and outdoor sport.

16. The peasant has the right to education, not only in the Three Rs, but with special application to land and its problems, up to the highest point of which he is capable, through the medium of National Education Plan.

17. The poor and exploited peasant will attain his true and rightful stature as a happy and prosperous citizen of the beautiful and renowned country he inhabits.

It was a charter full of promise, comparable to the Magna Carta, a charter which advocated the liquidation of the age-old system of feudal exploitation and establishing a rural society founded on the golden principle of liberty and equality. It was for the first time in the history of Kashmir peasantry that a serious promise had been made to the poor peasants for their political and economic emancipation and the things now were placed in a right perspective.
In 1946, when Cabinet Mission visited Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, as the leader of National Conference, submitted a Memorandum which, in addition to other things said:

"Nearly 100 years ago, the people of Kashmir became the victims of commercial deal by the covetous agents of the East India Company. For the paltry consideration of 75 lakhs of Sikh currency rupees (less than a half million pound sterlings) the people of Kashmir, the land and the potential wealth, were sold away to Maharaja Gulab Singh, the Dogra vassal of the Sikh Kingdom.

We challenge the moral and political validity of this Sale Deed, to which the people of Kashmir were never a party and which has since 1846, been the document of their bondage."

The memorandum was followed by Quit Kashmir Movement very vigorously which, accompanied by the events occurring in the sub-continent dividing India into two sovereign countries, compelled Maharaja Hari Singh to leave Kashmir on 25th October, 1947 and thus power was transferred to the National Conference, Sheikh Abdullah as Nazim-i-Ala (head of the emergency administration) and then made Prime Minister on March 5, 1948.

336. For full details, see, JKA, Introduction to Naya Kashmir Manifesto, 1944, pp. 50-110.

337. Ibid., pp. 240-285.
On July 13, 1950, the Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah declared at Lal Chowk that, in order to redeem their pledge made in the Naya Kashmir programme, the Jagirdari system "will soon be abolished, land will be transferred to the tillers and other economic reforms will be taken up." On October 7, 1950, Big Landed Estates Abolition Act was passed which placed a ceiling of 22.75 acres, the surplus land to be transferred to the tillers. This Act led to the expropriation of 9,000 owners who owned among 8 lakh acres, without the payment of any compensation for the surplus land. Thus 2.3 lakh acres were transferred to about 2 lakh tillers, out of which 4.5 lakh acres of land were taken away from land owners. This Act was followed by many other Acts which liberated the peasantry from the age-old oppression, sufferings and dawned the period of his prosperity.

342. Ibid. For further details, see Chapter, Jagir, Chak and Muafi.