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Change and continuity characterized the history of agrarian structure of Kashmir during the Dogra Raj (1846-1947). From the viewpoint of changes that occurred in the agrarian relations from time to time, the period can be broadly divided into three phases: 1846-1894, 1895-1932 and 1933-1947.

The first phase witnessed the unprecedented tightening of the screws of "feudal" agrarian structure as a result of which the exploitative agrarian policy of the state reached to its climax. To legitimise its policy of rent-renting and varied kinds of oppressions, Maharaja Gulab Singh confiscated all private rights in land and declared all the land of the Valley as private property of the Maharaja. The peasants even lost occupancy rights. True, in the context of medieval taxation structure and other obligations to which a peasant was subjected to, and also in the context of land-man ratio (making land almost worthless) proprietary or occupancy rights had no material significance for the peasant. However, it cannot be ignored that the declaration of State ownership of land nullified all the old usages of agrarian relations which had made the state and the peasant almost equal partners of the land-produce. Now a new type of relations inaugurated wherein a peasant was simply a farm labourer, with hardly any alternative but to accept a deal with excessive balance in favour of the state and other superior right-holders of the land. This is abundantly clear from the maximization of land and other revenues.
of the period. Consequent upon this the peasant was left with not more than one-fourth of his produce. The confiscation of ownership and occupancy rights in land also justified the state policy of revoking or reducing the land-grants endowed by the previous rulers, and in this way helped the Maharajas to create a new class of their favourites.

The revenues of the Valley were appropriated by the state, the Jagirdars, the Musfirdars and the Chakdars. The biggest area whose revenues went to the state treasury was known as Khalsa. The state managed the cultivation of Khalsa land through a chain of intermediaries like Tehsildars, Kardars, Patwaris, Muqaddams, etc. In order to sustain their "Raj", the Maharajas patronized a class of influential people who acted as their collaborators. Of the first category of these collaborators were the influential families. The Maharaja's family members, relatives, top officials and some influential martial families of Kashmir and Jammu were the recipients of Jagirs. The Jagirs enjoyed by the Maharaja's family were almost unconditional. However, a Jagirdar was supposed to be always at the back of the ruler and any deviation from this expectancy would lead to the confiscation of the Jagir. Jagirs were, as a rule, hereditary unless they were purely given in lieu of some temporary service. The Jagirdars were not proprietors of land unless the proprietorship was categorically bestowed upon them. However, the Jagirdars acted as masters of their jagirs and exercised the power of evicting the tenants. The Jagirdar had
his own officials who looked after his jagir and collected revenues on behalf of their master. The jagirdars were both Muslims and non-Muslims though the larger share was appropriated by the family members of the Maharaja and his co-religionists.

For "invoking the Almighty's blessings", the Dogra Maharajas also bestowed the revenues of a small part of the Valley to religious men and institutions. Such grants were given either for the life-time of the grantee or in perpetuity. The muafis reinforced the foothold of the religious class. The major share of the muafi land was enjoyed by the Hindu religious class and their institutions.

A new landlord class, viz., the chakdars emerged during this period, when Maharaja Ranbir Singh adopted a policy of allotting big chunks of waste land (chaks) to his favourites. In granting the waste land, the Maharajas were goaded by two objectives. To bring waste land under cultivation, and, to reinforce their class of supporters. The chaks were assessed at very low rates. Since this land was brought under plough by the chakdars by enticing peasants from different places, the former enjoyed a stable position and so long as they paid the stipulated land revenue, there was no justification to dislodge them. These chaks were almost exclusively given to the Hindus.

At the lowest rung of the agrarian class was the peasantry. The peasantry was also stratified. However, except a few peasants who were acting simultaneously either as land revenue intermediaries like muqaddam or patwari or were running small business like petty
village shops (Wanis) or Waddars (money-lenders) or had other subsidiary sources and also enjoyed certain concessions from the state like Brahmans, Syyids and Sikhs, the peasantry in general lived a very papurized life. The basic reason for this abject condition was the high pitch of land revenue and other demands. Apart from snatching away three-fourths of their produce, the peasants were subjected to different types of begar, the worst being the "Gilgit begar." The practice of auctioning lands to the highest bidders which became common during this phase, added insult to injury.

The agrarian structure during this phase produced many results. First, it threw up a society in which a miniscule population lived a life of luxury, while the general masses were reduced to a papurized lot who battled for the barest survival. Secondly, the peasant population remained stagnant and did not register any growth because there were large-scale deaths of the peasantry owing to food famines and also because many of them left the Valley for good. Thirdly, the exploitation discouraged a settled life as it became a common practice with the peasantry to move from place to place in search of relieved conditions. Fourthly, the agricultural prosperity received a great set-back, as the peasantry lost interest in cultivation. The system of revenue collection proved a great boon for the revenue machinery as it provided considerable sources of peculation to them.
It is unfortunate that we do not find any organized effort on the part of the peasantry or any other class to protest against the oppression. The peasantry, however, showed a passive reaction either by running away from their lands or selling their "shadowy rights" to some influential persons in lieu of protection against the official oppression. In this way a new landlord class emerged comprising of non-agriculturist urban middle class.

In short some critical characteristics of "feudal" formation are found in the agrarian structure during this phase. First, it was dominated by a class of landlords, the Maharaja being at the top. They claimed maximum returns of the land on the ground that they were the masters of the land. Subject peasantry was a marked feature of this phase. The peasantry was forced to part with a major share of their produce with the Maharaja and his collaborators and to render various unpaid labour services to them. The revenues were collected from the peasants not with the object of promoting agriculture on the economic growth of the country but mainly for their own consumption. The peasants paid not because of expectations of return but because of custom, coercion and legal sanction. Legally the peasant could not leave the land, that is why we find the Tehsildars demanding back the fugitive peasants from the domain of another Tehsildar. However, if it did not work, it was due to the sabotage at the hands of bureaucracy who simultaneously constituted the landlord class.

The second phase (1895-1932) witnessed many changes in the agrarian structure of Kashmir. With the establishment of British Residency in Kashmir in 1885 and the pressure exerted by the sympathizers of Kashmiri Muslims from outside, the Dogra
Maharajas were forced to introduce certain reforms in the agrarian sector. It was in 1895-96 that the peasants were given occupancy rights (assami rights), i.e., they could occupy the land as long as they paid the assessed revenue. However, it is to be noted here that they were not allowed to sell or mortgage the land. Looking into the pros and cons of the conferment of occupancy rights; it developed a sense of confidence and belonging among the oppressed peasants; as there were now less chances of eviction from their lands. As such, he concentrated more on better use of his land. It also made the peasants to start a settled life, culminating into the genesis of the community consciousness.

Another change which took place during this phase was the collection of revenue in cash instead of kind and the rates of revenue were fixed properly, which left least chances of peculation for the revenue officials. The peasants, who were snatched of their maximum produce, could now retain a good quantity of food-stuffs with them. The revenue, which was charged at the rate of fifty percent plus other cesses amounting to not less than seventy-five percent, was also reduced from fifty percent to thirty-eight percent in 1904-05. Many taxes prevalent during the first phase were either curtailed or abolished in toto. If there remained anything with the peasants after paying the land revenue, the other accessory taxes had once again constricted them. But this concession undoubtedly ameliorated the condition of the peasants.

The nature of the most inhuman and barbaric practice of Gilgit Beger (that had fructured the back-bone of the Kashmiri peasantry) changed with the completion of the Gilgit Cart Road at
the close of the last century. Not only the Transport Department, attached with a fixed number of beqaris (coolies), was established but were also nominally paid for. However, it should be mentioned here that these wages were to be paid through the village headman (Mugaddam) who mostly pocketed these wages.

Notwithstanding these positive changes, the most unfortunate and negative part of this phase was the grant of assami rights to the landlords in and after 1900 A.D., which not only stabilized their position more but also provided them more and more chances of land-grabbing. This increased the volume of eviction. The Government, therefore, passed the famous Tenancy Act of 1923 which protected the tenants from eviction. This measure was undoubtedly a great change undertaken for the betterment of the tenants.

During the third phase (1933-1947), the pressure upon the Maharaja to ameliorate the condition of peasantry assumed unprecedented proportions. The All India Congress, the Muslim League and more importantly the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference (founded in 1931-32, which was converted into the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference in 1939) and many peasant Movements voiced the grievances of the Kashmir peasantry and demanded their immediate redressal. The Maharaja had no other alternative but to effect some changes in the agrarian sector. In this connection, the first measure undertaken was the Maharaja's
Order of 1933 which conferred the peasant the proprietary rights in land. It was now for the first time since the inception of the Dogra Raj in 1846 that the peasants became the virtual masters of the land they tilled.

Another important step taken for the benefit of the peasantry was the passage of Land Alienation Act of 1933. As had already been recommended by the Glancy Commission of 1932, this Act prohibited the owners not to sell more than one-fourth (twenty-five percent) of their holdings at least for the first ten years. It was done mainly to check the transferrence of land from the poor peasantry to the well-off people, as there were apprehensions that if there would be no such kind of check, the peasants, by selling their total land, could make their position much worse than before. In this way, the interests of the peasants were safeguarded. Besides, this Act confirmed the State Subject Ordinance of 1925 (which was passed into an Act in 1927), thus preventing any non-state subject from purchasing land in the state which, too, aimed at the welfare of the poor peasantry.

Other measures, taken by the Dogras was the passage of the Agriculturists Relief Act and the Right of Prior Purchase and Pre-emption Act. These Acts were a great boon for the peasantry. The peasant or tenant could drag the money-lenders (Waddars) to the court which could not only make a check to the arbitrary interest of the Waddars but also fix the instalments of debt to be paid to the Waddars, taking into consideration the paying
capacity of the peasant. Moreover, the non-agriculturist class was restricted to take land from the agriculturist class. Thus the peasantry was totally saved from land-grabbing at the hands of landlords and Waddars. Moreover, the peasants were provided seeds and loans for agricultural implements and the improvement in agricultural output. These regulations were aimed at the amelioration of distressed economic condition of the peasant community. The Agricultural Societies for the promotion of agriculture also were set-up. Not only this, the All Jammu and Kashmir Village Upliftment Association was set-up in 1936 for the removal of educational, industrial and economic backwardness of the peasant community. The most important step taken for their welfare was the establishment of Cooperative Societies which provided loans on nominal interest to the peasants.

The Government abolished many taxes like Nazrana and Malikena in toto and thus lessened the revenue burden from the peasants. Not only this, the land revenue was further decreased from thirty-eight percent to twenty-five percent, i.e., one-fourth of the total produce, which really was a great change in the agrarian system of Kashmir.

So far as the begar system was concerned, the state passed the kar-i-sarkar Bill in 1935 which not only prohibited any kind of begar but also made specific mention of the groups taken for carriage or as coolies who would be paid remuneration.
However, inspite of all these reforms, some dominant features of medieval agrarian system persisted till the end of our period of study. The landlordism continued and the peasants working on the lands of the Jagir-dars, Chakdars and Muafidars witnessed hardly any change. In spite of drastic reductions in land and other revenues, the peasantry in general was languishing in papurised conditions. They could hardly afford two times meals. They generally lived on rice-gruel, vegetables and fruits. No wonder then the peasantry started receiving even primary education very late after 1947 because they could not afford even a paltry sum, the education entailed to them. Obviously, the changes introduced to ameliorate the condition of the peasantry were mere paper edicts. Also, these changes proved ineffective because there was no technological development in agriculture and, for geographical reasons, the Kashmiri peasant could not raise more than one food crop in a year. The per unit productivity was also far less than one could expect elsewhere in the plains.