Chapter 3

Economic Structure and Making of the Crisis-I

‘The rich ruleth over the poor and the borrower is the servant to the lender.’¹

3.1. Agrarian Conditions

Economic structure may be defined as the composition and pattern of various components of the economy such as, production, employment, consumption of trade and gross regional product.² Structural change is conceptualized as the change in relative importance of the aggregate indicators of the economy. The process of development and structural change are intertwined, implying as economic development.³ The whole economic structure of Kashmir was based on the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits, the silk and shawl being the pivots of the structure of the geographically-locked Kashmir.

The structure under review is a matter of comprehensive interest as this was the structure which was ‘irrational’ i.e. non-capitalistic, non-profit oriented. The society’s structure and level of mobility, the spirit of enterprise that its institutions and dominant social values permit, and least of all, its general level of education all exert very direct influence on its capital investment structure. A society that is backward in all these respects can, in the long run, have but a rigid, unresponsive economy.⁴ In respect of Kashmir the domestic structure and capital accumulation of the structure was invested largely in the traditional branches, though the domestic structure acquired an unfavorable trend.⁵ In the nineteenth century, Kashmir was dominated by rural elite, with rich landlords exploiting the landless peasantry.

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³ Ibid., p. 10.
⁵ Ganga Nath Report, p. 59.
The economic structure of Kashmir was purely agrarian in nature like any other agricultural society and agriculture was the basic source of livelihood supporting roughly 87.5% population of Kashmir. With the establishment of Dogra regime in 1846 a new ruling structure was brought about. As the transfer came about through a ‘Sale Deed’, it came to pass that a country inhabited chiefly by Muslims was handed over to a non-local Hindu prince. The Treaty affected the life and conditions of people in many ways. One such consequence was the declaration of all proprietary rights in land in Kashmir null and void. The strong conviction of the ruler Maharaja Gulab Singh was that he had purchased Kashmir along with its people and livestock, in fact with all damned things which it contained. This was strictly adhered to by the subsequent maharajas of the Dogra regime. Maharaja Gulab Singh was so much obsessed with the payment of seventy-five lakhs of rupees for purchasing Kashmir, that he declared Kashmir as his private property and established a centralized system of government. The basic structure of the political system was however, allowed to remain ‘feudalistic in character’. In this feudalistically oriented state, the socio-economic and political life of the people suffered unabatedly from the unsound policies of the ruling class which at the best helped ‘the upper classes of the Hindus in particular to consolidate and to fatten themselves at the expense of the masses’. Thus, the ownership of the land with the king during the Dogra period was the new dimension which they added to land management problem of

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6 Ibid.
7 Foreign & Political Department, (Secret-E), File No. 86, 1877-78, NAI.
8 Foreign Department, (Secret, E), No’s 422-43, Pros. Dec. 26, 1846, NAI. It is pertinent to note here that we have a clear evidence of private ownership of land enjoyed by the people of Kashmir since the ancient times till Kashmir was sold to Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1846. For details of private ownership of land, See, Kalhana, Rajatarangini, vol. 1, p. 235 for ancient period; for Sultanate period see Tuhfat-ul-Ahah, p. 82, Manuscript, Research & Publication Division Srinagar, (henceforth RPD). For Mughal, Afghan and Sikh Periods see Mohd. Azam Didamari, Waqat-i-Kashmir, f. 147, RPD; Khalil Mirjanpuri, Tarikh-i-Kashmir, ff. 19-20, RPD. Also for further details, See, M.A. Kau, ‘Land Rights in Rural Kashmir; A Study in Continuity and Change from late-Sixteenth to Late-Twentieth Centuries’, Aparna Rao (ed.), The Valley of Kashmir in The Making and Unmaking of a Composite Culture’, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 218-19.
9 Dhar, Kashmir-the Land and its Management from Ancient to Modern Times, p. 82.
10 Maharaja Gulab Singh’s son Maharaja Ranbir Singh clearly stated the conviction and it was therefore that he included the following lines in his Dastur-ul-Amal, sanctioned by him ist samvat 1939 for the guidance of his successors, ‘this state has been created by my honored father, the late Maharaja Bahadur [Gulab Singh] which is confirmed by the Treaty of Amritsar of 16th March 1846, in our possession, without anybody else having any claim on it’, trans. from Persian, General Records, File No. 423 of Samvat 1939, JKA-J.
11 Khan, Freedom Movement in Kashmir, p. 11.
Kashmir. Though, the establishment of the Dogra rule brought a change in the administration as a result of the founding of Jammu and Kashmir State, yet the conditions of Kashmir continued to be as it had been under the Sikhs. During the period of our study frequent land settlements were carried in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, and it was understood that the settlement would lead to more rapid accumulation of capital in agriculture and its improvement, but Kashmir was still passing through a traditional economic order. The geographical isolation from the rest of the subcontinent and the increasing neglect of the rural economic infrastructure through corrupt and inept bureaucratic management created alarming consequences for the agrarian economy. The distribution of land brought unbearable pressure on peasants and migration became more intense. The landless peasants became an inexhaustible source of manpower for the landlords and state officials for carrying out begar (forced labour).

The agrarian structure was the main industry of the state supporting the large population. The overcrowding of population on this sector was of serious dimensions, and ways and means were not found of relieving it, so that the state would make progress in the economic field. Such physical and economic circumstances of the state justify that the production of food grains should have taken precedence over commercial crops and the accepted theory that an appropriate portion of cultivated lands should be cash crops and thereby increase the purchasing power of the agriculturalists can be applied to the state only subject to the overriding consideration that provision of food for both urban and rural population should come first. Thus, the figures of density of population, of productivity of soil, of average holding, and of the percentage of cultivated area which the various crops occupied presented no alternative to the proposition which would have made agriculture as supporting structure. The structure which was feudal in character was comprised of the various social classes of the society. These were the jagirdars, pattadars, chakdars and other segments of peasantry who made up all social classes in variety of ways. No pure and simple landlord class existed and chakdars were numerous.

14 Younghusband, Kashmir, pp. 176-80.
16 Ganga Nath Report, p. 66.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
Although high officials and Maharaja theoretically agreed that the greatest rewards in society must go to agriculturalists, they concerned themselves more with the raising of taxes. The Maharajas, all in their turn, appear to have been preoccupied with the western penetration to introduce anything new and settled in field of agriculture with a view to make larger profits. The marked features of the agrarian structure throughout the Dogra period were mounting pressure on land, the increased fragmentation of holdings, the volume of indebtedness, forced labour, the sad lack of interior communication and the general mental outlook of the landless peasants. Thus, the methods of agricultural farming practiced during the Dogra period offered no ground for optimism in regard to the increase in the yield of various crops. The farmer on the whole clung to his ancient methods of agriculture, his way of manuring were unscientific, his use of labour was uneconomical, his failure to introduce crops to fill up the gap during the off season made his dependence on the seasoned crops very pronounced, and scientific rotation and artificial manuring were practically unknown. There was a distant lack of enterprise in taking to good cultivation. On the whole the picture of the peasantry was unsatisfactory.

The less incentive availability prepared the general psychological make-up of an agriculturist to such an extent which finally precluded him from taking any risks in regard to improvement in the methods of cultivation. Apart from the fact that his outlook on life and religion had made the average villager a victim of superstition, pathetic, contentment and sullen fatalism, thereby putting premium on lack of enterprise and inaction, the

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20 *Ganga Nath Report*, p. 86.
21 The various crops which were cultivated can be divided into two categories *kharif* and *rabi*. The *kharif* included, rice, maize, cotton, saffron. *Rabi* included wheat, barley, opium, rape flax. The peculiar geographical setup has from the times immemorial been a serious handicap to intensive farming and diversification of crops in the valley. As a result of this the system of cultivation, was what is known as *ek-fasli* that is the land gives one crop in the year. The *rabi* crop which took four to five months to mature in other parts of the country took five to six months in the valley of Kashmir. See, Lawrence, *the Valley of Kashmir*, pp. 325-30. Since *kharif* was harvested by September/ October i.e. on the eve of snowfall there was little time to prepare the soil for the next crops. *Rabi* seeds were sown in such fields as had not been cultivated during the *kharif* season. See Fredric Drew, *The Northern Barrier of India*, London, 1877, pp. 172-3. Since *kharif* crops took longer to mature in Kashmir, they left no time for *kharif*. In effect, therefore, Kashmir’s peasants had to subsist on a one-crop economy—either *rabi* or *kharif*. R.L. Hangloo, *Agrarian System of Kashmir (1846-1889)*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 13.
average agriculturalist had little spare capital which would afford him any scope for adventure.  

During the maharaja Gulab Singh’s reign several attempts were made to introduce a “satisfactory” method of assessment but all of them proved unsatisfactory and also lacked a definite purpose. The happiness and welfare of the people depended almost entirely on the agrarian sector, which had a momentous effect on the character and development of the people. The state carried out a series of revenue assessments/settlements from the beginning till the end of the raj. But all of them were only aimed at the regularization of the extraction from agriculture and the maximization of land revenue which was necessary for the maximization of the profits. The methods of assessment carried out were those of batai (1846), kardari (1857), chakdari (1873), Ijara system (1876), village cash assessment (1880), Izadboli system (1882), and regular settlement of A. Wingate and then that of Sir Walter Lawrence.

The revenue extracted from these assessments was drained away to the urban areas, especially the city of Srinagar—the home town of the revenue appropriators. The actual producers, peasants were left with bare subsistence, which forced them to part with their other material assets to fulfill their material needs. The peasant was treated nothing more than a machine to produce for the idle population of the city which was motivated by political designs to check any type of rebellion from the elite section of Kashmir. As Wingate has put it,

‘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 the Pandits would compel the palace to yield to their demands’.

The famine of 1877-89, as a supplement to the other pretexts, provided the stimulus for the colonial government demanding an over hauling of agrarian rights and

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23 Ibid., p.83.
25 Ram Chander Dube, History of Revenue Administration in Kashmir, File No. 1644, 1927, JKA-J.
26 Wingate Report, p. 41.
28 Wingate Report, p. 73.
relations in Kashmir. The famine inquiry report of 1878 showed that large tracts of the valley got depopulated; the measures to import grain or give relief were being executed so feebly by corrupt officials as to render them useless.\(^{29}\) The famine had brought to light the inadequacy of the protection offered to Kashmiri cultivators by the agrarian arrangements of the Dogra State.\(^{30}\) Lawrence had shown that great loss of human lives could have been averted if the cultivator had been permitted to cut their crops before the start of the rains that destroyed the autumn harvest of 1877.\(^{31}\) The rigid adherence to the old revenue system, in which assessments were made on the standing crop, delayed the reaping operations.\(^{32}\) However, this old revenue system compelled both the Maharaja as well as the British Indian government to reorganize the agrarian sector which gave birth to land revenue settlements. The impact of the settlement will be discussed in detail in the subsequent pages. Before that the land revenue practices of the earlier times and during the Dogras are necessary to examine. It was this chaotic and irrational land revenue system put in place centuries before on which some cosmetic changes were made.\(^{33}\)

Prior to the establishment of the Dogra rule, Kashmir had witnessed various ruling dynasties and undergone numerous phases in state formation and revenue generation. The practice of giving land grants to a few families in exchange for loyalty and support continued throughout the centuries. The rulers generated resources by levying a number of taxes, besides collecting land revenue from the cultivators.\(^{34}\)

Right from Lalitaditya we have a connected account of the developments of polity and economy. According to ancient custom the state claimed only one-sixth of the produce of land. This seems to be an established practice not only in Kashmir, but

\(^{29}\) Foreign Department, (Secret-E), March, 1883, File no’s 81-82, NAI. Mr. Fanshawe’s note on the famine of Kashmir mentions that, Kashmir is a country in which, with ordinary foresight, there should be no famine. But where corruption, had entered the very marrow of officials such foresight was impossible. But, whatever may be said about the causes of the famine, the responsibility for the appealing waste of human lives that followed rests entirely on the Dogra rule and its officials. See Bazaz, *Inside Kashmir*, p. 67.

\(^{30}\) Rai, *Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects*, p. 149.

\(^{31}\) Lawrence, *the Valley of Kashmir*, p. 213.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 214.


\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 71.
throughout ancient India. It is not known when the practice of recovering grains in addition to the state share sprang up but that the cultivators were left without surplus is evident from sources. The early evidence is found in the Rajatarangini. In the well-known advice to his subjects by King Lalitaditya Mukhtapid (697-738), whose reign was famed supposedly for peace and prosperity and is believed to have made the land fit for cultivation of rice, ‘every care should be taken that there should not be left with the villagers some more food supply than required for one year consumption, nor more oxen than wanted for (the tillage of) their fields. Because, if they should keep more wealth, they would become in a single year very formidable Damaras, and strong enough to neglect the commands of the king.’ Although there is nothing in the passage quoted to show that it has anything to do with the question of collection, it may safely be deduced that in addition to the state share viz, 1/6th of the produce further demand was made from the villagers or the producers of food grains in kind, which left them only as much as was required for personal use.

In the 14th century with the establishment of the Sultanate, the state share of the produce is said to have oscillated, although Shah Mir, who assumed the title of Shams-ud-din, ‘abolished the exactions of his predecessors and having repaired the ruin caused by the invasion and exactions of Dalju, by written orders fixed the revenue at 1/6th of the produce.’ And with the coming of Zain-ul-Abidin the measures he introduced went a great way to improve the condition of the people by making them once more stable, peaceful and prosperous.

To maintain economic and political stability in the Subah of Kashmir emperor Akbar sent a five member team in 1859, to formulate the pattern of land revenue assessment and to determine the nature and volume of collection. Thus, a detailed report about the nature of land, its classification, production and appropriation was prepared, and the assessment of land and its revenues, carried out by the officials, made extremely difficult for the corrupt officials to continue their practices of depriving both

35 J.L.K. Jalali, Economics of Food Grains in Kashmir, Mercantile Press, Lahore, 1931, p. 27.
36 Ibid., p. 28.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 29.
the state and the peasants of their due shares.\textsuperscript{40} It was the first methodical settlement of revenue in Kashmir.\textsuperscript{41}

Generation of revenue was based on activities related to agriculture, village manufacturing and wood carving, weaving of woolen cloth, basket making, paper machie, silver and copper work shawl and carpet making, leather and furs. Taxes on all these economic activities and the import and export of various commodities provided revenue for the rulers, in particular the export of shawls and carpets. However, land taxes both in kind and cash formed a vital component of the revenue.\textsuperscript{42} More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the revenue of Kashmir state was drawn from land revenue and the cultivating classes.\textsuperscript{43} Therefore, it was important to encourage prosperous and diverse agricultural activities including the cultivation of grain and fruits.

During the days of the old Hindu rajas, the state is said to have taken no more than $\frac{1}{6}$ of the gross produce, the theory being that, on a division of the population into the inhabitants of the country and the inhabitants of the towns $\frac{1}{6}$ of the produce of the farmer was enough for the wants of the latter, as well as of the court and officials. The native dynasty of the Chak sovereigns took one half of the rice and one-tenth of the dry crops.\textsuperscript{44} Abul Fazl writes that although $\frac{1}{3}$ had been for a long time past the normal share of the state, more than two shares were actually taken, and in Akbar’s time reduced to one-half.\textsuperscript{45} The Afghans left all vegetables and minor cearls and took five eights of the rice.\textsuperscript{46} The Sikhs introduced the system of ‘traki’ i.e. exacting one or more traks of six sirs over above the fixed share. This was accompanied by cesses such as tambol, mandarin, rasum-i-daftar, and the like, and gradually the share of the state was augmented under one name or another, until at length in 1833 the Sikh governor Mian

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{40} Ibid.
\bibitem{41} Jalali, \textit{Economics of Food Grains in Kashmir}, p. 30.
\bibitem{43} Administration Report of the State for 1889-90, Foreign Department, (Secret- E), Feb.1891, File Nos. 295-326, NAI.
\bibitem{44} ‘Mr. Henvey’s Note on the Famine of Kashmir, Foreign Department, (Secret-March), 1883, File No. 86, 1887-80, NAI.
\bibitem{46} Kirpa Ram, \textit{Majmui-Report} (1872-73), Srinagar, p. 18.
\end{thebibliography}
Singh (discussed later) seems to have abolished a few cesses and only exhorted \(\frac{5}{6}\)th of the crops.\(^47\)

The state of affairs when Gulab Singh took it over in 1846, we are being told, was deplorable. He took from \(\frac{2}{3}\)rd to three quarters of the gross produce of the land about three times as much as was previously taken. The crops when cut by the cultivators were collected in stacks. One-half was as perquisites of various kinds, leaving \(\frac{1}{3}\)rd or only a quarter with the cultivators, of this some was taken in kind and some in cash. We do not have any statistical data but the available evidence shows the whole system of assessment and collection was exceedingly complicated and workable only in the interests of the corrupt officials. Gulab Singh during his reign did very little to ameliorate this state of things. He took things as he found them and troubled little to improve them.\(^48\) It was up to 1860 that the state took \(\frac{3}{4}\)th of rice, maize, millets and buck wheat, and \(\frac{9}{16}\)th of oil seeds, pulses and cotton.\(^49\) Although he brought a degree of tranquility to Kashmir during the eleven years of his reign as Maharaja, as far as political situation is concerned, in the imposition and collection of taxes he acted as a veritable “economic vampire”.\(^50\)

The method of assessment during the period of Maharaja Gulab Singh was \textit{batai}. Under this system, the estimate of the revenue was decided when the grain was in heaps and was divided in the heaps after threshing as in regular \textit{batai}.\(^51\) The total demand of the state amounted to half of the produce. In addition to this the peasant had to pay about sixteen percent of the produce as \textit{trakee} and \textit{abwabs}. \textit{Abwabs} were the other cesses levied by various officials.\(^52\) The net calculation amounted to \(\frac{2}{3}\) of the produce and \(\frac{1}{3}\) was left to the peasant.\(^53\) One \textit{Kharwar} of paddy was equivalent to sixteen \textit{traks}. The peasant was supposed to offer to the government and other officials the following: land revenue-eight \textit{trak}, \textit{traki}-four \textit{traks}, tax on rice straw and vegetable produce-\(1\frac{1}{2}\) seers, \textit{tambol}-one \textit{trak}

- \(^{47}\) Henvey’s Note on the Famine of Kashmir.
- \(^{50}\) Bawa, \textit{Jammu Fox}, p. 183.
- \(^{51}\) H.M. Lawrence, \textit{Transfer of Government to Maharaja Gulab Singh}, File Nos. 33-44, Section C, 28\textsuperscript{th} January, 1848, JKA-J.
- \(^{53}\) H.M. Lawrence, \textit{Transfer of Government to Maharaja Gulab Singh}.
two seers, other cesses-one trak. Out of sixteen traks the peasant was left with two traks.\textsuperscript{54}

Prior to the Lawrence’s settlement, any measure adopted, mostly resulted in taxing the cultivator beyond his capacity.\textsuperscript{55} Since the settlement introduced by Todar Mal the crops used to be divided into kimiti and ordinary. The former included cotton, mong, tilgogal, sarsun, linseed, saffron, etc.; under the latter fell shali and maize, etc. The fixation of prices by the state was not feasible. For ‘kimiti’ crops the state rate was much higher than the bazar rate, and if a lucky villager had to pay his demand in ‘kimiti’ crops, he could purchase from the bazar and credit it the state at state rates, and thus, gain by the transaction even though he had to pay for the collecting agency; otherwise, the demand would be pressed to be paid in shali or maize, state rates for which were lower and the villager suffered, for it would leave him very little or even nothing to live upon.\textsuperscript{56}

This haphazard mode of collecting was aggravated by the system of adoption of izadboli or auctioning of villages. Auctioning was nominal. The bid would be in the name some official or influential city man and even then no payment would be made by the bidder, and the demand would be shown as arrear in the books. Allied to this, the system of seed grain advance meant to advance grain to the cultivator to save him from starvation which never reached him; the relegating of a village to the list of ‘Sakim-ul-hal’ (unable to pay the demand –infirm condition) even though it had enough resources; the advice of Giriftani to collect arrears; the detestable system of begar or forced labour; and the exemption from it of people (villagers) who were fortunate enough to be hired labourers of a chakdar or an official, and seek protection under a ‘powerful name’ the unreliable system, of last, but not the least, heinous exaction of rasums and other numerous taxations—all these tended to abuse the system which was introduced with a view to improve both the cultivator, his land and the state revenues.\textsuperscript{57} The vacillations, in the system of land revenue collection have, as noticed above, had a very disastrous effect

\textsuperscript{54} Thorpe, Cashmere Misgovernment, pp. 50-55.
\textsuperscript{55} Jalali, Economics of Food Grains in Kashmir, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., pp. 42-3.
upon the people, the villager as well as the townsmen. The villager if he ran to the city would join the member of paupers fed at state charity to whom shali was supplied at rates that were from the economist’s point of view, not allowed to rise along with the demand. The effect was crushing—‘the pseudo cash assessment was a double edged-sword invented to retard the progress of the times.’

Lawrence argues that, the revenue was, as a rule, so high that the loss of one or two revenue payers was enough to ruin a village. The total demand of taxes levied on the peasant amounted to sixty percent of the gross produce. Due to high pitch of land revenue demand the revenue fell into arrears both during the pre-settlement and post settlement periods. According to Lawrence, ‘so long the officials and relatives of officials are allowed to form new estates by withdrawing cultivators from khalsa village, so long will the land revenue of Kashmir continue to decline.’

The figures of the total demand and collection of land revenue from samvat 1975 to 1999 (1918-1942 A.D.) are as under:

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58 Ibid., p. 44.
60 *Khalsa* villages were those villages which paid their revenue direct to the treasury and were not encumbered with charges for individuals or institutions. Another category of land was the jagir villages; the revenue of these villages was assigned by the state to individuals either as a reward for services rendered or to be rendered. The institution of jagirs of the Dogra period shouldn’t be confused with Mughal jagirs. While the Dogra jagirdar enjoyed unlimited powers and considered himself to be the virtual owner of the landed estate, the Mughal jagirdar was a mere functionary of the government. The main motive behind the assigning of these were more political exigencies than to pay any reward in lieu of services, because jagirdars served as supporting structure to the illegitimate ruling character of the Dogras. Third category was of those villages which were assigned for the maintenance of certain temples. These villages were maintained by a separate department called Dharmarath. See, Foreign Department, letter from W.R. Lawrence, Settlement Officer, Kashmir, to Colonel R.P. Nisbet, Resident, Kashmir, dated Srinagar, the 13th Nov. 1889, demi-official, NAI.
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<th>Year/Samvat</th>
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<th>Collection (in lakhs rupees)</th>
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<td>43.59</td>
<td>36.95</td>
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<td>1976</td>
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<td>1999 (1942 A.D.)</td>
<td>54.64</td>
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As is reflected in the table the demand has increased from about 44 lakhs to about 55 lakhs, an increase of about 25%. As against this the collection has increased from 37 lakhs to about 50 lakhs, although, there is a considerable gap between the demand and its
There was no fixity and finality fairly followed in the nature and collection of the revenue liabilities. Beyond the recognized taxation, (discussed later) there was other taxation quite as sure and as binding on the villages as the states claims. Wingate has argued that, the revenue system was such that whether the cultivator worked much or little, he was left with barely enough to get along on till next harvest. The prevailing system of realizing the demand in kind necessitated a separate department under a special officer, called the revenue commissioner (Diwan-i-jins) whose business was to arrange with the local officers for the transport of the grain to the public store houses to distribute it at fixed rates and to keep the accounts. The balance which remained with the cultivating class was not more than enough to meet their bare subsistence; on the other hand, the government, after providing the army and other departments was left with large surplus to which the urban population looked for support which by mere reason of the monopoly (discussed later in this chapter) they have to take under certain restrictions as to the price and quantity, the amount which a family may draw daily being regulated not by their means of purchasing but by the will of the government. One adverse result of the heavy demand of revenue was that the cultivators opted for inferior type of rice variety. This was so because good varieties would attract greater attention of the revenue collectors and resulted in more exactions. As a result we see that although white rice commanded higher price and little yield but still red rice was preferred. Same was the case with wheat and barley. The orchards are said to have been uprooted by the people as these attracted the notice of the Darbar. High quality fruits which are acquired through grafting of the fruit trees like apple and pear were not raised for the same reason.

So surely was prosperity turned into pretexts for further extortion, that farmers have been known to decline offers of foreign seed, lest the unusually fine crops that might be expected therefrom, should catch the eye of the tax gatherer. The principal cause, therefore, of the ruin of the Kashmir’s agrarian set up was the pressure of the land revenue, which was assessed at such a proportion as to deprive the agriculturists of all

63 ‘Note by Walter Lawrence on the Position of the Cultivating Classes in Kashmir’
65 Charles Girdlestone, Memorandum on Cashmere and Some Adjacent Countries, Calcutta, 1874, NAI, p. 08.
66 Foreign Department, W.R. Lawrence, Settlement Officer, Kashmir to Colonel R.P. Nisbet, Resident in Kashmir dated Camp, Kashmir the 2nd Dec.1889, NAI.
incentive to extortion.\textsuperscript{67} The arrangements for the collection of revenue were complex. In most parts of India the demand of the state was satisfied by a sum of money which was fixed for a term of years, the cultivator or his employer would theoretically do what he likes with his lands and his crops, and so long as he paid his due by the appointed day, he was unmolested. The Kashmiri peasant had no such privilege, not even in theory. In Kashmir the crops were actually divided upon the ground and in a manner which combines the greatest risk of loss to the ruled with the greatest certainty of extortion from the ruler.\textsuperscript{68}

The common practice was that to let out a circle of villages to a contractor, who engaged to deliver a stated quantity of grain representing an estimate of the government share, together with numerous petty cesses in cash and kind for the support of the Hindu priests, for the support of officials, for the expenses of the village servants and so forth. The contractor was remunerated by a percentage as commission, aided by a chain of officials who excepting in the lowest grades were Pandits and were therefore out of sympathy with the peasantry. All these were mostly irregularly paid and were consequently forced to live on the peasants’ back. The list of these officials is as (1) the \textit{tarazudar} or salesmen, weighed shares of the state and zamindar (2) the \textit{shakdar} who watched the crops (3) The \textit{sazawal} who controlled the \textit{shakdars}, (4) the \textit{patwari} or accountant (5) the \textit{muqqadam} who aids the Pandit (6) the \textit{kardar} over several villages arranged distribution of food, (6) the \textit{tahsildar} in charge of several \textit{parganas}. All these officials were to be supported by the peasantry; a heavy burden was, therefore, inflicted on them.\textsuperscript{69}

Not only was the high revenue demand of the state an abhorrent burden placed on the Kashmiri cultivators [while Pandits and Pirzadas were assessed at much lighter rates],\textsuperscript{70} but it was made heavier by the food control system operating in the valley. The main crop grown in Kashmir was rice, for which no market existed in real sense of the

\textsuperscript{67} Note by Walter Lawrence on the Position of the Cultivating Classes in Kashmir.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 106. Apart from the governing class, the religious heads of the Muslim community of Kashmir were also responsible for much of the woes of the peasantry.
term, and its export had been prohibited since the early days of Dogra rule developing into the system of the state monopoly of grain selling, which was used by the official class to their own advantage.\textsuperscript{71} No free market system was allowed, where prices would rise and fall in accordance with supply and demand. The grain monopoly was having private advantages and in general terms, however, it can be said that the official class of Kashmir would regard as calamity the introduction of any reform that would have the effect of introducing a free sale of rice in the Bazars, for the short supplies and restricted distribution were all in their favour.\textsuperscript{72}

The cash crops like, sarson, tobacco, cotton, linseed, saffron, walnut oil were taxed separately; also, fruit trees, honey, sheep and goats were taxed. Under the above listed items, the state share was not less than $\frac{3}{5}$ of the gross produce and what remained with the cultivator was even less than two fifth; sometimes it was only about one third of the total producer.\textsuperscript{73} The abundance of the fruit, berries, and nuts, the extensive grazing area and forest produce, enabled the cultivators to survive, but an assessment so heavy reduced the cultivators, forcibly confined within the valley,\textsuperscript{74} to the condition of daily labourers or slaves.\textsuperscript{75}

It would not be out of place here to mention that the country had never been subject to a fixed assessment and, of course the cultivator had always been uncertain of the extent of his future liability.\textsuperscript{76} A crude system of fluctuating assessments, regulated not by any recognized theory or principle, but depending upon the will of provincial

\textsuperscript{71} Foreign Department, K.W. Political A, Dec.1879, File Nos.155-188, NAI.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{74} The past inhuman policy of imprisoning the people within the valley called Rahdari continued under the Dogra also, with strong conviction. In respect to the hereditary habits and social organization of the Kashmiri’s as effecting emigration one may quote the folk saying ‘Mulk-i-Kashmir kaid be zanjir’ – the truth was that the Darbar couldn’t effort to let the people go, because once in British territory, they would never return to the scene of so much poverty and oppression, and Kashmir would be deserted for a generation. The official theory was that emigration was permitted, but the people were so contended with the new system inaugurated by Diwan Anant Ram that they refused to abandon their homes, yet corpses were seen daily in the streets of Srinagar. See, Foreign Department, Political –A Dec. 1879, File Nos.155-188, NAI.
\textsuperscript{75} Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh, p. 106. Of all the more valuable kinds of fruits $\frac{3}{4}$ of the annual produce was taken by government. See, Charles E. Bates, A Gazetteer of Kashmir and Adjoining Districts of Kishatwur, Badarwah, Jammu, Naoshera, Punch and the Valley of Kishen Ganga Gazetteer of Kashmir, p. 101.
governors and subordinates, had been in vogue to the great detriment of the agricultural classes.\textsuperscript{77} As a result of this heavy demand of land revenue, peasants were often forced to give up cultivation and many times payments fell in arrears. In 1857, Maharaja Ranbir Singh issued an order that all arrears if not recovered by \textit{Nauroz} (Persian New Year) day, may charge interest at the rate of Rs. two in cash and two \textit{kharwars} of rice for every hundred, per month.\textsuperscript{78} Here, it becomes evident that the revenue system continued to vitiate the entire agrarian economy till the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century,\textsuperscript{79} and desperately a need was felt to have a land revenue settlement, which on the one side, would change the scenario to some extent but on the other side provide an opportunity to the British Indian government to intervene. The task was entrusted first to A. Wingate, who carried out a preliminary survey of land and submitted his report, and finally to Walter Lawrence. Before giving a clear outline of the settlement, it is necessary to investigate the nature and impact of the institution of jagirdari on the agrarian structure of Kashmir.

\textbf{3.2. Institution of Jagirdari}

Besides the excessive pressure of the heavy revenue demand and serving the revenue officials, the peasant was subject to another class called jagirdars. Jagirdar refers to those semi-autonomous chiefs who held large number of villages and did not personally cultivate the land and sustained instead on rented earnings of the land.\textsuperscript{80} There were three types of grants made by the state to jagirdars; jagir grants made as reward for services rendered or to be rendered to the state; grants made for political exigencies and religious grants mainly for the support of religious institutions.\textsuperscript{81} Every grant was made either as an equivalent of a certain annual sum of money or in respect of a certain area of land or in respect of whole villages.\textsuperscript{82}

The first category of the jagirs was given to kith and kin of the Maharaja, who were serving the state. These jagirs were quite large. For instance, the jagirs bestowed to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{79} R. L. Hangloo, “the Magnitude of Land Revenue Demand in Kashmir (1846-1900)”, \textit{Social Scientist}, Vol. 12, No. 6, 1884, p. 56.
\item\textsuperscript{80} Lawrence, \textit{The Valley of Kashmir}, p. 239.
\item\textsuperscript{81} Chitralekha Zutshi, \textit{Languages of Belonging}, p. 71.
\item\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Raja Amar Singh and Raja Ram Singh, sons of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, enjoyed the revenues of 80 and 38 villages respectively. The jagiridar not only enjoyed the property rights but also wide range of powers on his estate. They acted as real power holders within their estate. Their function was to collect revenue and to impose various other cases on the cultivators who formed those villages. The cesses, charged by the jagirdars were innumerable in number. The cultivator’s working on the jagir lands were purely at the mercy of the jagirdar who could be at any time ejected, subject to the will of the jagirdar.

The peasants were mainly working as tenants on the land of the jagirdar and enjoyed immunity from Gilgit begar—the only protection which the peasants of jagir lands were having in comparison to peasants working on the khalsa lands. While explaining the state of jagir cultivators J.L. Kaye writes, ‘it must be a mystery how in the face of such exactions the inhabitants of jagir villages have continued to cultivate the land. That they have done so can only be explained on the grounds that in khalsa villages the exactions of the revenue officials, before the current settlement, exceeded even those of jagirdars or that to escape the evils of Kar-i-begar, the cultivators considered it to their interest to pay this heavy price for exemption.’ However, this didn’t mean that the cultivators working on the jagir lands were free from begar but they were subject to it by the jagirdars for their own needs and requirements. Even if a river passed through the jagirdars lands, the peasant who fished in that river had to provide fish to the jagirdar.

Who were the jagirdars? And to whom jagirs were given? What were their powers? At the time of the establishment of Dogra Rule there were 3115 jagirs. The institution of jagirdari was an age old institution in Kashmir. From the ancient times the rulers used to give lands as agraharas (jagirs) to individuals and religious institutions.

83 Pol. Gen. Dep., File No. 7, 1890, JKA-J.
84 Pol. and Gen. Dep., File No. 117, 1896, JKA-J.
85 Pol. and Gen. Dep., File No. 122, 1896, JKA-J.
86 Pol. and Gen. Dep., File No. 232/H-12, 1908, JKA-J.
87 J.L. Kaye, Proposed Scheme for the Revision of Assessment in Kashmir Valley, 1904, NAI, p. 3.
88 Foreign and Political, File No. 19/33, 1931, JKA-J.
89 Pol. and General Dep., 76/1876, JKA-J, quoted in Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 72.
mostly guided by subjective considerations. Maharaja Gulab Singh tried to revoke all
the establishing jagir order as he, unlike the Sikh Maharajas, was reluctant to grant
Muslims any significant portion in the higher echelons of his administration and upon
assuming power, he discharged most of the Muslim officials who were serving in the
revenue department.

Besides the submission of the powerful Khaka and Bomba rajas of Muzaffarabad,
there were also other Muslim jagir holders, Dharmarath holders and kardars in Kashmir
whose power and holdings got shaken upon the inauguration of the Dogra Rule. However, it seems that Gulab Singh’s move was more guided by re-structuring of jagirs
to create a new class of supporters, than by any other interest. Under the British pressure
he was persuaded to leave all who had grants of lands of old standing in possession. It
was to exercise and propagate himself as a sovereign ruler that he sought the continuation
of the jagirs to be at his pleasure.

At the top of giving of jagirs were the close relatives of the Maharaja. Second
were the officials like governor and in the third category were some influential families
like Naqashbandis of Kashmir. Jagirdars were mainly Dogras or Punjabi officials in the
high positions of government or Pandits at the higher levels of the administration mostly
residing in the city of Srinagar. The chief jagirdars rendering civil services to Maharaja
were Pandit Kamal Bhan, chief recorder keeper, Munshi Trilok Chand, chief treasurer,
Hakim Azim, chief Physician, Lachman Pandit Dhar, governor of Kashmir, Wazir Ratnu,
kotwal and Ganasha Chief Toshkhana, Wazir Punoo, Wazir Zorawoo and Raj Kak
Dhar. These persons were rendering service to the state with a wide range of authority.

Jagirdars who were having the jagir of two or three villages besides the above
cited were as Raja Amar Singh, Raja Ram Singh, Dewan Amarnath, Maharani Bandraji,

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92 Bawa, Jammu Fox, p. 171.
94 Ibid., p. 53.
95 Ibid.
96 Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 72.
97 Ibid.
Lachman Das, Nakashbandis, Malik Munwar Shah and many others.\textsuperscript{98} With the passage of time the number of jagirdars went on increasing in order to create a strong supporting structure. Maharaja Hari Singh during a single year (1926-27 A.D.) granted jagirs to various persons valuing rupees 16,320.\textsuperscript{99} The persons to whom jagirs were given were Sobha Singh, Tarkur Kartar Singh, Takur Puran Singh, Rao Raitan Singh and Raja Hakum Singh.\textsuperscript{100} In 1931 Maharaja Hari Singh on the occasion of the birthday of his heir bestowed jagirs to twenty persons, among whom eighteen were Dogra Rajputs and two were Muslims.\textsuperscript{101}

Absentee landlordism was one of the results of the jagirdari. Many of the jagirdars used to give their jagirs to ‘unscrupulous’ middle men known as mustajirs or revenue contractors, for a year at a time.\textsuperscript{102} The jagirdars used to take revenue in kind which gave birth to more abuses.\textsuperscript{103} This led to hue and cry and a committee had to be constituted in May 16, 1929.\textsuperscript{104} The committee recommended that the revenue be taken in cash not in kind; because in kind the jagirdars demanded more than what was due. The committee’s recommendation for cash was accepted. It was also accepted by the jagirdars, on the condition that they should be granted more jagirs to compensate for them for the loss, they would sustain by the change. Most of the khalsa land, which ought to have gone to the peasants, was handed over to the jagirdars. What was more problematic in this connection was that large tracts of fertile lands in Kashmir were granted as fresh jagirs to some Rajputs of Jammu.\textsuperscript{105}

What appears from the scenario is that the promotion of the state-led institution of jagirdari was holding the neck of the poor peasant.\textsuperscript{106} The dispossessed peasant was forced to trek hundreds of miles down to the plains in search of food.\textsuperscript{107} A change

\textsuperscript{98} H.L. Rivett, \textit{Assessment Report of Mian Jagirs}, 1896-97, Civil and Military Gazette Press, pp. 9-11, JKA-J.

\textsuperscript{99} Foreign and Political Department, File No. 48 of 1927, JKA-J.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{103} Bazaz, \textit{Inside Kashmir}, p. 231.


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
occurred in the nature of these institutions only after 1930s. In 1933 as a result of the Glancy commission recommendations the people were given property rights of their ‘own’ land along with the right of sale and mortgage, with no effective land Alienation Act. This backfired because the Act couldn’t prevent the peasant from disposing his land in times of difficulties. Thus, in a year’s period mortgages increased from 3,610 acres to 12,183 acres and sales increased from 9,208 acres to 21,499 acres of land.

The other two types of jagirdars were the Maufidars and Mukkararees. These were further leaching the vitality of the peasant and enjoyed more or less the same privileges as jagirdars. The first was a religious muafi under which 1/3rd of the land revenue was received by the muafidars in cash and the other two thirds in kind. Not only they didn’t pay revenue on these free holds but they possessed lands in ownership also, for which they paid no land revenue. Thus the money to which state was entitled only filled the pockets of these privilege holders. Non-religious muafis were given to those persons called Mukkararees, for the construction of works for public use such as bridges and wells and so on. But they were paying little service to the state and caring still less for the welfare of the common man. This was a group of ‘do nothings’, a dead weight on the resource of the state, generation after generation.

All these classes were unproductive in nature, a stagnant burden on the economic structure of the state. These classes aggravated the problems of the state and reduced the cultivator. According to P.N. Bazaz, ‘the poverty of the Muslim masses was appalling. Dressed in rags which could hardly hide his body and barefooted, a Muslim peasant, presented the appearance rather of starving beggar than of one who filled the coffers of the state. He worked laboriously in the fields during the six months of the summer to pay the state its revenues and taxes, the officials their rasum and the money-lender his interest. Most of them were landless laborers working on the assets of their absentee landlord. Their share of the produce was not enough for more than three months; for the

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109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Afzal Beg, On the Way to Golden Harvest, p. 15.
112 Wingate Report, p. 29.
113 Afzal Beg, On the Way to Golden Harvest, p. 15.
114 Ibid.
rest they had to earn by other means. During the six months they were unemployed and had to go outside the boundaries of the state to work as labourers in big towns and cities of British India. Their lot as such was no good, and many of them died every year unknown, unwept and unsung outside their homes.\textsuperscript{115}

The peasants were systematically worse than the inhabitants of the capital. They were taught by long and bitter experience to consider themselves as serfs, and to regard themselves as having no rights whatever. They were left for their own use so small an allowance of the produce of their land that they never, even in prosperous years, had more than barely sufficient with which to tide over until the following harvest. And in Srinagar itself the lower orders of society were better off only by comparison with the inhabitants of the villages.\textsuperscript{116}

3.3. Lawrence Settlement

It was after the death of Ranbir Singh, succeeded by his eldest son, Pratap Singh, a man of the most kindly nature, very shrewd, old fashioned in some ways, and intensely devoted to his religion.\textsuperscript{117} He succeeded to an administration which had become a byword for bankruptcy, corruption and resentment and none to help him to restore order and system. The Brahmins, known as Kashmiri pandits, had seized all power and authority and the Muslim cultivators were forced to work to keep the idle Brahmans in comfort. In 1889 the Kashmir state was bankrupt.\textsuperscript{118} The rich land was left uncultivated, and the army was employed in forcing the villagers to plough and sow the land and worse still, the soldiers came at harvest time, and when the share of the state had been seized and these men of war had helped themselves, there was little grain to tide the unfortunate peasants.\textsuperscript{119} Lawrence states that a proverb of Kashmiri language which was often in vogue was, ‘batta batta tah piyada patta’ implies that, ‘we are crying for food and the tax

\textsuperscript{116} Dermot Norris, Kashmir the Switzerland of India, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{117} Sir Walter Lawrence, The India We Served, London, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 127.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
collector is after us!’ He claims that at the time of the commencement of the settlement of the land everything save air and water was under taxation.\footnote{Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 417.}

At the time of Pratap Singh’s accession to the throne the Dogras had already ruled the valley for nearly forty years. Yet beyond restoring order in the land they had been able to achieve little. Condition of people had deteriorated physically as well as mentally.\footnote{Bazaz, The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir, p. 126.} Special codes were formulated and preferential treatments were given by the maharaja to his own community. As Mridu Rai argues, ‘the Maharaja was in fact representing the interests of only the small Hindu segment of his Kashmiri subjects. The measures instated by the maharaja and passed by the state council that made even more transparent the state’s narrowly construed definition of subjects whose interests were to be promoted.’\footnote{Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim subjects, pp. 140-41.} In 1894 the Maharaja and the council inaugurated the ‘Pratap Code’ ‘this being a regulation to ameliorate the condition of the Dogra Rajput’s, specially, the code was intended to provide Dogra Rajput’s greater access to land, on revenue-free terms for the first five years and at only half the rate subsequently, access to education, exemption of their villages from begar (forced labour) and of their cattle from taxation. Such anxiety for their ‘circumstances’ was reserved for the Dogras as they were the Maharajas ‘brethren’.\footnote{Ibid.} They were also excluded from the capital punishment, and Dogra jagirdars settled in Kashmir were released also from the requirement of obtaining licenses to possess firearms on the grounds that they could not be treated like the general public.\footnote{Ibid.} This was a significant concession in a state that had since Gulab Singh’s times worked actively towards appropriating a monopoly of coercive powers.\footnote{Ibid.} It is clear, as noted by Chitralekha Zutshi, ‘that the Dogra administration was attempting to create a class of men loyal to the state who, significantly, were not drawn from the ranks of Kashmiris; most were Punjabis or Dogras, alongside a few prominent Kashmiri Pandit bureaucrats.\footnote{Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 71.} In 1866-67 Maharaja Ranbir Singh granted chak lands to Hindus who were the members of his administration, on condition that they remain Hindus, accept

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\item\footnote{Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 417.}
\item\footnote{Bazaz, The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir, p. 126.}
\item\footnote{Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim subjects, pp. 140-41.}
\item\footnote{Ibid.}
\item\footnote{Ibid.}
\item\footnote{Ibid.}
\item\footnote{Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 71.}
\end{itemize}
services nowhere else, and pay at a low revenue assessment. Special consideration was also extended to Kashmiri Hindu landed interests so that while Muslim jagirdars were required to pay nazarana on their concession to a jagir, Kashmiri pandit jagirdars were confirmed in 1910 in their exemption from similar payments. During the days of the great famine of 1878-1879 the Muslim subjects were allegedly discriminated against. This discrimination is reflected in the memorandum of early 1877 was stealthily submitted to the British viceroy at Delhi by some unknown Kashmiris making which made specific charges against Ranbir Singh the memorandum was never published in full. Parts of it that were subsequently quoted by some informed British writers in their books. In the memorandum charges leveled against the Maharaja were grave in character. The most serious charges made, were that in order to save the expense of feeding his public, Maharaja Ranbir Singh had preferred to drown boat-loads of Muslims in the Wular Lake. The British had taken these allegations seriously enough to appoint a commission of enquiry but Kashmiris Muslims had supposedly been too frightened to come forward to provide corroboration. Although the Maharaja was exonerated, the outrage aroused by this publicity shocked the valley’s Muslims and called for some measure of intervention by the colonial government. Even more critically, the Dogra Darbar’s attitude towards Kashmiri people during the famine had demonstrated its incapacity to rise above the preferential treatment of its already privileged Hindu subjects to the detriment of the Muslim cultivators who were the greatest sufferers.

It was against this background that Pratap Singh at the time of his accession to the throne was confronted with the conditions which were formally presented by a British officer on behalf of the viceroy that the maharaja shall have to just introduce certain reforms in his administration and secondly accept a British officer as resident. Though apparently it seems that the purpose of the British intervention was purely guided by the sympathetic attitude of the Britisher’s for the people of the Kashmir, in reality it was

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127 Ibid.
128 Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects, p. 141.
130 Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects, p. 142.
131 Ibid., p. 142. Though there some were other reasons of intervention, to discuss them is beyond the scope of the very chapter. For other reasons, in fact, more important and decisive than the above-cited, see Ali Mohd Pir, British Policy Towards Jammu & Kashmir (1846-1947), PhD. Thesis, Aligarh Muslim University, 2013.
guided more by imperial exigencies than by any sympathetic consideration. Prior to the establishment of the residency it was thought necessary to compel the maharaja to introduce some reforms in Kashmir; the British thought that the move will be resisted, if it will not be guide by some people oriented measure. It was, therefore, thought necessary to introduce a settlement under the charge of an English officer and the connected reforms would immensely strengthen the Resident’s hands, which would put at his disposal a valuable and effective instrument for exercising his supervision which the British thought necessary and also act as check to the policy of excluding European officers from the service of the Darbar.133

The measures, therefore, proposed by the colonial government in the state of Jammu and Kashmir were also guided by economic considerations besides other imperial exigencies. Among the proposed measures none was as thoroughgoing as the land revenue settlement operations instituted between 1889 and 1895 overseen, first by A. Wingate then by the British civil servant Sir Walter Lawrence.134 The impact of all these settlements on the peasants of Kashmir who were groaning under the misrule is a question which needs a through probing in order to show the implications of Lawrence’s settlement both on the agrarian as well as on the socio-economic structure of Kashmir.

Lawrence condemned the administration of Kashmir for being opposed to the interests of the cultivating classes and to the development of the country and asserted that the officials systematically endeavoured to make themselves feared by the people.135 Wingate too has argued the same—‘that the Kashmiri cultivator had been pressed down

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133 Foreign Department, letter from T.J.C. Plowden, Resident in Kashmir to the Secretary of India, No.319, dated Srinagar the 23rd June, 1886, NAI.
134 Walter Lawrence’s celebrated work The Valley of Kashmir has much to say regarding the wretched condition of Kashmir when he began his famous work of land settlement in 1889. In the book Lawrence draws an apt comparison between the condition of the Kashmir peasantry then and that of the French peasants just before the Revolution, and greatly to the advantage of the latter, who, however bad their plight, had never sunk to the same depths of hopeless degradation. In these circumstances it was not perhaps surprising that Lawrence found the people suspicious, sullen, and furtive, with every man’s hand turned against his neighbor, thrift and honest labour to be almost unknown, and bands of hungry peasants roaming the valley, anxious only to avoid the ubiquitous tax gatherer and to find the wherewithal for a hand-to-mouth existence. Lawrence besides exposing the inner contradictions of the society of Kashmir was also guided by the motive to justify the imperial intervention in the internal affairs of Jammu and Kashmir. He is still remembered by the people of Kashmir as ‘Laren Sahib’.
135 ‘Note by Walter Lawrence on the Position of the Cultivating Classes in Kashmir.’
to the condition of a coolie cultivating at subsistence allowance the state property.¹³⁶

Both A. Wingate and Lawrence spent a considerable time in the rural hinterland of Kashmir. They brought to the fore, in an unprecedented manner, the tensions that underlay Kashmiri society, pitting the interests of the Hindu community against those of the numerically preponderant Kashmiri Muslim cultivators within the framework of the Dogra state.¹³⁷

For the first time in the chequered history under Dogra rule, the rights of the peasants of were defined “without any ambiguity”.¹³⁸ The eye-witness accounts, of course predominantly European, portray an improved picture of the post-settlement Kashmir which is in total contrast to the murky picture of the pre-settlement period. Two instances may be cited here, both recorded by European travelers, who are unanimous in their descriptions regarding the pre- and post-settlement Kashmir. Their accounts are supplemented by what Lawrence writes in his work; rather their accounts are highly exaggerated. O’ Connor in conversation with a peasant records,¹³⁹

‘…this chance halting place under the chinars of Panzin [name of a place] brought me also across the foot prints of another man whose name is engraved upon the history of Kashmir. For as the evening grew the village headman came and sat by the brook and conversed about his fields. “Sir”, he said, “since Laren [W.R. Lawrence] we have had great peace. He came walking along the very road on his way to Wangat [name of a place] and I stood before him, thus, with folded hands, said “huzoor, here is great zulm (injustice), yon (that) field is mine, but another from the next village who has friends at court, has stolen it from me… and Laren said, “what is your name?” And I said Sobhena the son of Futto, and he put it down in his note book, and then said, “what is name of your field?”’, and I laughed and said, “huzoor, they call my field Bamjoo,” and he put that also in his book, but said no more and took his way, and lo! In the fullness of day when the settlement was accomplished, my field was given back to me, and justice was done.”

“And who was Laren?” I enquired… “Laren,” he replied, “was the great sahib who made

¹³⁶ Wingate Report, p.19. Wingate notes that I saw mobs struggling and fighting to secure a chance of getting a few seers of the government shali, in a way that I have not witnessed since the great famine of southern India and found it impossible to obtain any record of bazar prices.’ Ibid., p. 17.
¹³⁸ Dhar, Kashmir the Land and its Management, p. 134.
the settlement; the friend of all zamindars. Since his time a deep confidence has settled
upon our hearts. It was he who said “o wise ones do not part with your lands for they will
one day become gold.” Some of the other farmers of the neighborhood had by now
quietly joined our party, when the headman had finished his tale; they echoed it with
evident sincerity. “It is true,” they said, “Laren was our great benefactor and our
children’s children will remember his name.”

Another incident is recorded by E.F. Knight. About a village, that he had already
visited once, he says, ‘this was once a considerable place, but the houses are now in ruins
and on the wastelands the square of grass grown ridges shows the boarders of the former
paddy fields. The whole of the inhabitants fled to India in the fatal year 1879. These
people are now flocking back. After a year before our visit there were but seven families
in the village, we now found thirty, for during the previous twelve months, twenty three
families had returned from Punjab, where they were doing well, the report of Mr.
Lawrence’s settlement work in their native land and of the security from oppression in
the settled districts having reached these exiles.140

Due to the settlement operations carried out Lawrence claims that the cultivators
‘now felt economically so secure as to voluntarily pay their land revenue before the date
on which it f[ell] due, and the agriculturists who used to wander from one village to
another in quest of the fair treatment and security which they never found, were now
settled down on the lands and permanently attached to their ancestral villages.’141 While
it cannot be doubted that as a result of the land settlement the cultivating class felt secure
and were a bit relieved, but that their grievances ceased to exist is, without an iota of
doubt, an overstatement and misrepresentation of facts at the grass root level.

In the same tone the Census of 1901 has shown positive changes in terms of the
material prosperity; considerable amount of waste land was brought under cultivation and
the peasant was now in the position to sell his surplus grain to urban traders, thus entering
the sphere of legitimate and lucrative trade.142 Peasants’ purchasing power increased

140 E.F. Knight, Where Three Empires Meet, London, 1893, p. 79.
141 Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 450.
142 Khan Bahadur Munshi Ghulam Ahmad Khan, Census of India, 1901, vol. XXII, Kashmir Part, I, Lahore,
fields fenced orchards planted, vegetables gardens stocked and mills constructed. But the Census does not provide any statistical data to corroborate the assertion. Despite these statements being highly exaggerated the land settlement, as Chitralekha Zutshi argues, led to the creation of settled peasants, a class that would become an increasingly important focus of the emergent political discourse in the valley at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁴³

In the settlement the state demand was fixed for fourteen years, payment in cash was substituted for payment in cash and kind, occupancy rights were conferred on zamindars in undisputed lands, waste land were entered as *khalsa*, permanent but non-alienable hereditary rights were granted to those who accepted the first assessment, and all lands was carefully evaluated on the basis of the produce, previous collection and possibility of irrigation.¹⁴⁴

Paradoxically, with the land settlement carried out by Lawrence the position of the privileged holders of land rights primarily Hindu became more fully entrenched in the agrarian hierarchy of Kashmir.¹⁴⁵ By the settlement the peasant got a legal status of occupancy on land but it didn’t confer upon him the status of a peasant proprietor. Legally land continued to be the property of Maharaja.¹⁴⁶ This was from the Mughals onwards that the zamindars in Kashmir had possessed the undisputed right to cultivate and hold land.¹⁴⁷ The Kashmiri cultivators had the right to occupy land so long as they paid the revenue as it fell due but they could neither sell nor mortgage it.¹⁴⁸ The tenants at will held land subject to the will of the proprietor, who could eject them at any time. They were of two kinds namely (1) those that held land directly from a landholder or the state, and (2) those that held land under occupancy tenants.¹⁴⁹ In Kashmir occupancy tenants consisted mainly of those tenants who held land at the time of Lawrence’s settlement and had once been declared by a competent court to be such. In the cities and

¹⁴³ Ibid.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid.
towns of Kashmir and the frontier districts people were given the rights of selling or mortgaging the land. In almost whole of the Jammu province, excepting the three tehsils of Ramanaga, Basohli and Mirpur, the people were declared to be proprietors of land, which was parceled out to tenants. In these three tehsils the landlords were *malguzars* and enjoyed the right of selling or mortgaging it. This was a glaring instance of the differential treatment that the people of Kashmir province, particularly of rural areas, received under Dogra rule—a case of provincial prejudice.\(^ {150} \)

Lawrence’s settlement left privileges in the land more or less undisturbed. The land revenue demand was not significantly reduced under the land settlement, which meant that the weight of the collecting and managing authority continued to exercise a fair amount of power over the peasantry.\(^ {151} \) By converting a hereditary right to occupancy into a jurisdictional one sanctioned by the state, the peasant became a tenant of the state. In case of the absence of the paying his revenue in time he was liable to be ejected.\(^ {152} \) The settlement entrenched *chakdars* on their procured land by recognizing their occupancy rights on such lands, which helped bolster the new Dogra and Punjabi landed class ‘imported’ into the valley by the state.\(^ {153} \) Rights in land enjoyed by these groups of non-cultivating class were not only maintained but were strengthened. The settlement confirmed the chakdars or Mukararidars. The chaks were granted to various persons of non-cultivating classes by entering them as assamis, that too on privileges rates. In such a scenario even the procured lands as mentioned above which the chakdars might have grabbed by fraud were legalized in their favour.\(^ {154} \) The settlement, therefore, legalized the absentee landlordism in Kashmir and strengthened the feudal relations which were eventually shattered after the passing the Big Lands Estates Abolition Act in 1950 that came as a major breakthrough in the agrarian history of Kashmir.

\(^ {150} \) Ibid., p. 134.
\(^ {151} \) Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 100.
\(^ {152} \) Ibid., p. 101.
\(^ {153} \) Ibid.
\(^ {154} \) Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 426.
Jagirs lands were not included in the Lawrence survey, and were kept in place by Lawrence. In theory they were returned into assamis of the villages in which their estates lay. It widened the social gap more because of the slow impoverishment of the peasantry than the enrichment of the few. The new rights granted to cultivators by Lawrence settlement were balanced by bolstering a set of more conservative, compliant and favoured groups within the agrarian structure of Kashmir. Hence a parasitical symbiosis was established which benefited the alien usurpers and paralyzed the host, who survived under conditions of a low level equilibrium, where the basic process of production and the level of technique were left virtually unaffected with the small peasant economy largely persisting on the basis of the organization of agriculture. It seems that the settlement was created as a shrewd device both on the part of the British as well as from the side of the Dogras, a “social buttress” in the context of an alleged spread of political discontent and recurrent peasant protests in Kashmir, though nonviolent in nature. Therefore, the establishment of the British Residency argues Ayesha Jalal, ‘curtail[ed] the powers of the maharaja by establishing a council of administration. While creating tensions between the maharaja and his imperial benefactors, cosmetic changes at the top were no substitute for the massive facelift needed at the social base.’ Besides the reduction of the peasant to a form of debt peonage reflected more far reaching consequences. Agricultural indebtedness had been marginal in the period before Lawrence settlement. Indeed both the settlement officers had commented on the uniqueness of Kashmir in that ‘the banya (the Hindu moneylender) of India’ was practically unknown in Kashmir. This didn’t however mean that there was no credit mechanism in operation. Most of the larger villages had their wani or bakal who was usually a Muslim peddler running modest retail business in salt oil spices snuff, sugar, tea and occasionally cotton piece goods. The wani also doubled as a small scale moneylender under the system known as wad. Through the wad system therefore a borrower repaid his

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155 Ibid., p. 239. The privileges which were enjoyed by the jagirdars were the application of the law of primogeniture to jagirs and muafis ownership rights on kalsa land and compensatory jagirs. See Afzal Beg, On the Way to Golden Harvests, p. 12.
156 Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 426.
159 Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 387; Wingate Report, pp. 16-7.
loan in kind through the goods such as blankets, fruit, and grain... which would be evaluated by the *wani* at a lower rate than that at which he sold than on the market.\(^{160}\)

This led to the steady displacement of a society of homogeneous and relatively egalitarian village communities with sharp social and economic differentiation. It was a kind of money landing on compound interest. The account was maintained in the ledger in a most complicated manner. The borrower used to pay something every year but the original sum remained intact in his name.\(^{161}\) It was kind of stagnant entrepreneurship.

P.N. Bazaz, gives a detailed account of this, ‘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 *shakdars* and Muslim *wadars* and *khojas* 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 rupees thirty or forty is not paid in full during a life time. Consequently the father leaves the debt to his son and in this way the family remains perpetually under debt. The entire classes of peasants are virtual serfs of the money lenders.’\(^{162}\)

During the post settlement period conditions worsened further with a marked increase in indebtedness. This was the direct result of Lawrence converting the payment of at least part of the revenue owed to the state from kind to cash.\(^{163}\) Though figures regarding indebtedness are hard to come by, that it had grown into a significant problem, is attested by none but by the ruler Maharaja Hari Singh himself when he promulgated the Agriculturist Relief Act in 1926 with a view to freeing the agriculturists from the clutches of the money landers and protect them from usurious rate of interests.\(^{164}\) By this time it had affected more than 70% of rural population of Kashmir as already mentioned, though efforts were made to reduce the indebtedness through the passing of the Act of

\(^{160}\) Ibid., p. 5.

\(^{161}\) Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, p. 44.


\(^{164}\) *The Glancy Commission’s Report*, p. 35.
1926. Despite the efforts the agrarian indebtedness in Kashmir seems to have increased over time as is shown by the facts that debts in Kashmir amounted to the total arrears in 1947 amounted to Rs, 12,01,231. As late as 1946 a British writer had observed that in a typical village every household was in debt and the usual rate of interest was 48% and that the tiller was indebted who might also be the land owner. The resulting process was not only an increased burden on the peasantry, their poverty and indebtedness but it also led to increasing differentiation of classes and dispossession of cultivators who were reduced to a position close to serfdom or brought down into the ranks of the swelling army of the landless proletariat.

Related to the indebtedness of Kashmiri cultivators was the increasing pressure placed on the land in the early decades of the twentieth century. Peasants were forced to cultivate land and a good deal of land was available in Kashmir which was left uncultivated… for which the services of Lambardars and Tahsildar had often been enlisted to bring fugitive peasants back to cultivate the land. The pressure on land got further aggravated by a steady decline in handicraft production due to the over taxation and the easy availability of machine made goods in the valley the result of which was that agriculture began to provide the only escape to artisan classes. As a result of this in the early decades of the 20th century the value of land increased not in terms of surplus but in terms of population of non-agriculturists.

Though by the Lawrence settlement permanent and occupancy rights were given to the Muslim cultivators, the conferral of permanent hereditary occupancy rights by Lawrence settlement had within it a loophole. Before the settlement the accumulation of revenue deficit against villages known as bakaya (outstanding) had been permitted without entailing that such arrears would necessarily result in the eviction of cultivators from the land. After the settlement and in the conditions of growing pressure on the land the non-payment of outstanding revenue led to proliferation of what was known

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166 Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects, p. 171.
167 Lawrence, Assessment Report of the Lal Tehsil, p. 37; The Valley of Kashmir, p. 420
euphemistically as the *dustbardari* ("voluntary" relinquishment) of occupancy rights.\textsuperscript{170} While the land so relinquished was not put on the market, since technically there was no right of alienation until 1932 the effect was only mildly different. The state reassigned them to any person who would agree to pay the arrears. This process resulted in the continued consolidation of large estates by the privileged landed classes and creation at the same time of a class of landless labourers. This process was conducive to the creation of a large section of landless labourers as existed by 1931.\textsuperscript{171}

To sum up the discussion, that Lawrence’s settlement had only theoretically provided a parity of rights in land for Kashmiris and the ills of an agrarian administration and a hierarchy of privileged otherwise left largely untouched,\textsuperscript{172} and the privileges in the state that followed the broad lines of religious divisions among the subject population were not only continued but reinforced.\textsuperscript{173} The built-in defects remained intact. The relation between the state, cultivator and the landlord remained as before.\textsuperscript{174} The feudalistic character with the system of jagirdari was left intact and practically no change took place in the method of collection of land revenue by the officials.\textsuperscript{175}

Thus as already mentioned the marked features of the agrarian set up were the mounting pressure on land the increased fragmentation of holdings the volume of indebtedness forced labour (discussed subsequently under the sub-heading of the same name), the sad lack of interior communication and the general mental outlook of the landless peasantry collectively contributed for the making of the crisis and it were these disgruntled sections who later wholeheartedly supported Muslim Conference under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and the consciousness roused in the actual tillers of the soil proved a challenge to the Dogra regime and entirely engendered a new spirit among the masses.\textsuperscript{176}

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\textsuperscript{170} U.K. Zutshi, *Emergence of Political Awakening in Kashmir*, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
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3.4. Peasantry and Peasant Existence—A Conceptual Framework

Ever since the beginning of agriculture some five hundred years back rice has remained the predominant cereal in Kashmir. Its cultivators alone had the full status of a peasant. Rice cultivation has been its most distinct feature and rice cultivator makes a typical Kashmiri. Kashmiri culture has been synonymous with rice culture. Other crops like wheat, barley, lentil, maize, pulses have been subsidiary and on that land which was not suitable for rice cultivation, it had second grade status in the whole agricultural scheme. While dealing with peasantry we predominantly deal with rice cultivator. In Kashmir this biggest segment of the society constituted about 83% of the total population.  

Kashmir was virtually dependent on this single crop and obviously it required a sound and well defined policy development. But instead of promulgating and pursuing any policy for its development the trust was put on taxation and exactions. Here an attempt is made to show how this approach rendered this single crop cultivation almost a non-profitable occupation.

In order to get an understanding of the state of the peasantry during the period it is essential to examine the state of peasantry prior to the establishment of the Dogra Raj. During the preceding Sikh period the peasantry of Kashmir much mired in poverty and migrations of Kashmiri peasants to the plains of the Punjab reached a high proportion, which is testified by the account of various European travelers who visited the land during the period. G.T. Vinge, who visited the valley during the 1840’s, records, ‘Ranjit Singh assuredly well knew that the greater the prosperity of Kashmir, the greater would be the inducement to invasion by the East India company…and most assuredly its [Kashmir’s] ruin had been accelerated, not by his rapacity than by his political jealousy, which suggested him, at any cost, the merciless removal of its wealth.’  

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Though the sources pertaining to the period bring fore the pathetic conditions of the peasantry but despite the fact, Kashmir’s economy came on a “stabilized” track.¹⁷⁹ Moorcroft says that, ‘of some portions of the khalsa lands the sovereigns divested themselves by grants in jagir for various periods, but when the country came into the hands of the Sikhs, Ranjit Singh made a general resumption, and ousted the possessors of grants of land of every class and the khalsa lands were lent out for cultivation.’¹⁸⁰ Due to the consequences of the famine of 1832, the Sikh governor Mian Singh realized the folly of heavy taxes and with a view to stimulating population, remitted the taxes upon marriages, and set to work to bring some order into the administration. Revenue divisions were made, and the villages were either farmed out to contractors or leased on the principle that the state took half of the produce in kind. Agricultural advance were made free of interest, proper weights were introduced, and fraudulent middlemen were punished.’¹⁸¹ One can’t deny the fact that Kashmir was the second richest province of the Sikh kingdom in terms of revenue receipts, next to Multan.¹⁸²

Coming down to the Dogra regime, a drastic change took place in the agrarian composition of Kashmir—the change of the law of proprietorship.¹⁸³ The Dogra ruler of Kashmir perfected the concept of personal rule soon after taking over the valley. In fact, he came to personify the state as he set about pacifying unruly elements in his newly acquired territories and laid down the economic structure of the valley whereby the distribution of rice became a monopoly of the state. The government set the price of rice

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¹⁸¹ Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 200.
¹⁸³ Though the nature of proprietorship has been dealt with in the preceding subheading, what is important to mention here is that as according to Sumit Guha such type of proprietorship can be defined as a sort of partible inheritance where the state is having the ownership rights and the cultivator acts as the primary labourer on the land he, cultivates. Sumit Guha argues that what emerges in such type of proprietorship is not differentiation and accumulation in rural economy but a sort of flattened class structure. No accumulation, productive or otherwise, takes place in this structure and the economy runs on the way to asphyxiation, unless rescued by an exogenous development e.g. superior technology. In the context of Kashmir such a rescue came in the form of a colonial settlement of land when for the first time the rights of the cultivator were defined, but couldn’t prove a true remedial to the release of the cultivator from the fetters of the ultimate oppressor...the privileged classes, taken to its logical extreme. The kind of scenario Guha presents envisages no potential for any kind of accumulation, productive or otherwise. See, Sumit A. Guha, ‘Agrarian Economy of the Bombay Deccan’, in K.N. Raj (ed.) *Essays in the Commercialization of Agriculture*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986. pp. 232-35.
and other commodities and undertook their supply to city population.\textsuperscript{184} It was the foundation of such a kind of economic structure the reminiscent of which can be found in the ruling structure of the East India Company after becoming the masters in Bengal and southern India during the decade and a half following the middle of the eighteenth century, when they stepped into the shoes of the sovereign power by virtue of acquisition of diwani in Bengal and jagird in the Northern Circars and elsewhere. The legal forms which concealed these conquests are not material except in so far as they provided rationalization for the main acquisition, the power to levy and collect land revenue and other taxes.\textsuperscript{185} Gulab Singh arrived on the scene although in a different setting, yet with a motive somewhat similar to the British—the motive of generating as much revenue as possible. His power to impose and extract taxes and revenue, despite his lack of legitimacy to rule over Kashmir, probably became the most significant factor in his thirst for greater revenues and profit.

The set procedure for the state monopoly of grain was that the grain reserved for the state was conveyed, as occasion required, on ponies or in boats to the public granaries, whence it was sold by officers appointed for the purpose at prices that seem extraordinarily cheap\textsuperscript{186} when compared with those in India.\textsuperscript{187} The common people reaped little advantage from the low prices. While the officers of government and the Pandit privileged class had no difficulty in obtaining as much as they needed at the fixed rate, the stores were often closed to the public for weeks together, and at other times the grain was sold to each family in a quantity supposed to be proportionate to the number of persons in the family.\textsuperscript{188}

To quote Vasant Kaiwar, ‘monopoly’ is a process analogous to the surplus drain in which wealth produced in the agricultural sector is siphoned off to the urban economy

\textsuperscript{184} Demi-Official letter from F. Henvey to A. C. Lyall’, 5\textsuperscript{th} Dec 1879, Foreign Department (Secret-E), NAI, 1883, File Nos. 83-85, p. 2; Wingate, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{185} Irfan Habib, Essays in Indian History Towards a Marxist Perception, 8\textsuperscript{th} rep. New Delhi, 2010, p. 299.

\textsuperscript{186} The government rate in 1879, according to Henvey was at first rupees three of local currency, equal to company’s rupees 1-14 per kharwar of rice in husk. The kharwar was reckoned at 90 local seers equal to nearly 80 British seers. The rice was loaded with dirt and moistened with water, so that it yields only half the quantity of cleaned grain. Therefore the rate was company’s rupees 1-14 per mound of 40 British seers of cleaned rice, which gives over 21 seers per company’s rupees. See Mr. Henvey’s Note on the Famine in Kashmir, 1877-80’, Foreign Department (Secret), File No. 86, March 1883, NAI.

\textsuperscript{187} ibid.

\textsuperscript{188} ibid.
by the powerful merchant monopolies [the state in the case of Kashmir]. By virtue of the monopoly over lucrative trading networks, merchants [state grain dealers] could effectively shut out the peasantry. The great staple of Kashmir i.e., rice had been practically kept in the hands of the Darbar, and the system of holding enormous stocks of unhusked rice and of selling the grain at very cheap rates had prevented the growth of indigenous grain merchants. The poor cultivators derived from their labour hardly sufficient to keep themselves alive, and the wages were kept down because the state sold the staple grain to city people [elite classes as well as artisans] at cheap rates below the market prices.

The cultivator used to hide the grain in order to keep, himself in ‘comfort’ for few months beyond the expectation of the state authorities. E.F Knight says, ‘it must be understood that the bankruptcy of a village in no way incommodes the inhabitants, save that it prevents them from working for any surplus produce which the state can call upon. The Kashmiri cultivator is quite reckless about the accumulation of the arrears. He knows that the state can’t recover them, while ejectment from his miserable home is no great punishment. The state indeed, rarely resorts to ejectment, as it can gain nothing by it. When the revenue collectors arrive at a village it is curious to observe sometimes how the farmer’s cattle, even his crops, vanish as by magic, having been taken up into the mountains for concealment, his earthen pots and his blanket being all that is left to him. The assami has but two objects in life...to earn his bare living from his fields, and to escape that curse of Kashmir, the begar or forced labor. He dare not accumulate wealth and exists from hand to mouth.

‘Characteristically, however, there is a shift of attitudes when the peasant confronts the person who has a lie on his surplus of rent or on his surplus of profit...the merchant,[state grain dealer] and the tax collector not only represent an actual or potential threat to him in his endeavor to balance the various funds that make his existence possible, but they are also connected to him by ties which are based on a single economic

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190 Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, pp. 390-6.
or social interests usually motivated by the wish for gain. In Kashmir the cultivators didn’t seek to make money, for if it the officials heard of it, it would at once be wrung out from them. For instance, the contractors on the Murree road offered high pay for the use of the farmers’ bullock-carts in the winter season, when these were not required for agricultural work, but the farmers, knowing that the profit wouldn’t be theirs refused to supply them. The other professionals were doing the same. Knight mentions that a Shikaree (boatman) will often beg a sahib (Englishman) who had employed him to write a paper for him, stating that his pay has been but one half of that really given, so that he may deceive his rapacious tyrants and retain some portion of his earnings.

The reason for this lie or hiding the surplus is the limited productive capacity of the peasant, in his limited withholding power, in his limited purchasing power, in his attempt to keep the influences of the market at bay. Yet such exchanges [surplus] effective tie the peasant to the larger order at once facilitating his requirements for exchange and threatening his social and economic balance. It should be noted that when the peasants’ arrangements for the exchange of commodities becomes part of a market system, the market effects not only the peasants produce, and the goods and the services he can command with it, but his very factors of production as well. It is pertinent to note that in Kashmir the existence of a class of landlords whose real interests lay in living in urban areas and in assuming political office, and who saw the exploitation of the countryside as a quick way of accumulating wealth to use in their political and social ascendency deprived the cultivating class of any incentive. Such a system is self-limiting in that it reduces the cultivating population’s consumption to the biological minimum. Thereupon the city benefits from the surplus drained from the rural areas by the collectors, without generating expanded rural productivity. The greater importance accorded to the city population in the economic system of the valley, argues Chitrakala Zutshi, ‘was an important theme in the political economy of the pre-colonial subcontinent in general, put cultivators at a further disadvantage, characterized by a one sided flow of grains from villages to the city of Srinagar in the late nineteenth century Kashmir

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193 E.F. Knight, Where Three Empires Meet, p. 66.
194 Ibid.
economy, remained in vogue with minor changes until the late nineteenth century. Kashmiri people were allowed a fixed amount of rations of their own cultivated produce; if an individual wanted more than the designated amount, he had to get permission from the officer’s in charge of government storehouses.\textsuperscript{196}

As already discussed, Maharaja Gulab Singh continued the revenue system of the Sikhs, and throughout India the general trend was the surplus extraction on behalf of or in the name of the sovereign ruler. Whatever the origins, it was the cardinal principle of the Indian agrarian system that land revenue should embrace the bulk of the surplus above the peasant’s needs of subsistence.\textsuperscript{197} The Kashmiri cultivator besides paying the revenue of \textit{rabi} and \textit{kharif} crops, as already mentioned, had to pay various other cesses.\textsuperscript{198} In practice, the cultivator had to pay much more than half the share of the produce in the form of multifarious taxes to the state. These included the \textit{Nazarana}, levied four times a year, and \textit{tambol} about 20\% of produce, taken on occasions of marriages in the ruler’s family.\textsuperscript{199} The cultivator had not only to feed the Darbar but the whole contingent of the middlemen, whose names have been already mentioned elsewhere, and actual sources of revenue fell short to meet the demand which was met from other assets than those of the crops. What was distressing was that there was no fixity and finality in the system of taxation. Below mentioned is a table of the levied taxes, by which one can understand the height and nature of the demand of taxation.

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
Tax & Description \\
\hline
\textit{Nazarana} & Levied four times a year \\
\hline
\textit{Tambol} & About 20\% of produce \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{197} Irfan Habib, \textit{Essays in Indian History Towards a Marxist Perception}, pp. 297-98. There is a big lacuna in most of the studies carried out on the agrarian structure of Kashmir pertaining to our period, that they have neglected, rather have given a least consideration to the social processes ongoing in Kashmir in comparison with colonial India. But the fact of the matter is that Dogras treated Kashmir on par as the British imperialists treated India as colony. There is a much similarity in various methods that were in vogue in British India were in vogue in Kashmir. It is therefore imperative that the layer of ‘isolation’ should be shattered to bring out the real historicity of the facts into fore.
\textsuperscript{198} Wingate Report, pp. 18-9.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid. Mirza Saif-ud-din a British spy in the Maharaja’s court, classified the taxes charged on the peasants as state share of the revenue, \textit{rasum} (rasum was the revenue extracted by revenue officials from each village as their personal share), and additional state collections. See, Mirza Saif-ud-din, \textit{Saif-ud-din Papers}, Vol.1-2, RPD, Srinagar.
| Tax of 2 percent (*Do kharwari*) | Rs. 18 13 | Tax on apricot trees<sup>200</sup> | Rs. 10 0 0 |
| Sala, *jalus*<sup>201</sup> | Rs. 18 13 | *Nazrana*, tax for support of temples, tax for dispensary, etc | Rs. 99 0 0 |
| Kanungo tax | Rs. 03 14 | Tax on Maharaja’s temple | Rs. 02 08 |
| Patwari tax | Rs. 03 14 | Tax on account of establishment | Rs. 77 3 3 |
| Tax on account of and granted to *chakdar*<sup>202</sup> | Rs. 58 09 | | |
| Tahsildars | Rs. 12 | *Chob-i-kot* | Rs. 21 |
| Tahsildar’s Assistant | Rs. 8 | Wool | Rs. 12 |
| Naib-tahsildar | Rs. 8 | Grass | Rs. 8 |
| Parcha Navis | Rs. 5 | Share of crop taken by Zilladar | Rs. 9 |
| Mir Chaudhri | Rs. 13 | Share of crop by Mir Chaudhari | Rs. 7 |
| Mir Chaudhrai’s Assistant | Rs. 11 | Share of crop taken by Patwari & Lambdar | Rs. 7 |
| Mir Zilladar | Rs. 5 | Items taken by Police | Rs. 6 |
| Zilladar | Rs. 10 | Tahsil Establishment | Rs. 7 |
| Rassad-Talabana | Rs. 25 | Wasi Bäki Navis | Rs. 10 |
| Blankets (Rs. 6 paid for blankets of Rs. 10 value) | Rs. 4 | Sihaya Navis | Rs. 3 |
| Ponies (Rs. 18 paid for pony of Rs. 40 value) | Rs. 22 | Tahsil Treasurer | Rs. 2 |
| Others | Rs. 5 | Tahsil Kanungo | Rs. 4 |
| Ghi taken | Rs. 12 | Twenty fowls taken for officials | Rs. 5 |
| Sheep taken | Rs. 6 | Tahsildar’s fine | Rs. 10 |
| Violets, Zira and Guchis | Rs. 4 | Miscellaneous | Rs. 4<sup>203</sup> |
| Item for permission to pay as revenue 1 *kharwar* of cotton | Rs. 5<sup>204</sup> | Nikah (wedding) tax raised from 10 to 100 rupees<sup>205</sup> | |

<sup>200</sup> This particular village actually did not grow any apricot trees, File Nos. 106-110, NAI, p. 2.

<sup>201</sup> *Sala*: A tax for Sanskrit schools; *Jalus* was a tax on account of expenses of English visitors.

<sup>202</sup> Whether the *chakdar* cultivated the land or not, the cultivator was obliged to pay the amount assessed.

<sup>203</sup> Foreign Department, W.R. Lawrence, Settlement Officer, Kashmir, to Colonel R.P. Nisbet, Resident, Kashmir, Dated Srinagar, the 13<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1889, demi-official, NAI. ‘Note by Walter Lawrence on the Position of the Cultivating Classes in Kashmir’. Robert Thorpe states that peasant ended up paying out of every 32 *traks* of each *Kharif* crop 21 *traks* and 11 1/2 *seers* as revenue in kind and out of 32 *traks* of each *Rabi* 20 *traks* and 6 3/4 as revenue in kind, besides paying the share of the fruit, animal tax, sheep and goat, ponies, putto, ghee, fowls and honey...the accounts of all the taxes were kept by the patwari and Mokuddum and the distribution of retuned money...on some of the articles. Thorpe, *Cashmere Misgovernment*, pp. 13-6.

<sup>204</sup> It is said that this item was of great importance. The state accepted a certain portion of its revenue in cotton, oilseed and pulses and gave for these articles a commutation rate considerably higher than the market price. The villages would buy cotton from the bazar at Rs 8, and pay it to the government at Rs. 14 and was worth their while to bribe the Tahsildar for the privilege of paying their revenue in highly price commodities. The village in question never grew cotton.

<sup>205</sup> Khalil Mirjanpuri, *Tarikh-e-Kashmir*, MS, RPD, Srinagar, p. 331.
The prevalent system of making exactions led to the establishment of a machinery for observation and regulation of the process by which peasant-owned land became encumbered with debt and thus subject to potential appropriation by the agrarian bureaucratic management. Having a long list of taxes and cesses it shows that the taxation policy of the Dogras was ‘to continue most of the time honoured cesses and taxes based probably on the principle of maximum exactions from the people which they could be compelled to disgorge even at the cost of their maximum displeasure short of desertion or revolt and the inhabitants of Kashmir grumble but pay.’

In fact it seems that Gulab Singh considered his purchase of Kashmir a financial investment and was determined to squeeze as much rich economic dividends from his investment. As possible keeping in view the purchased notion of Kashmir, the harsh taxation system of the pre Dogra period was not only maintained, but in some ways broadened. An eyewitness Hodson who accompanied Henry Lawrence to Kashmir in 1850 writes, ‘the king is avaricious and is old…and he won’t look beyond his money-bags. There is a capitation tax on every individual practicing any labor, trade profession or employment, collected daily.’ Similar view has been expressed by Mirjanpuri, ‘in the extortion of money he [Gulab Singh] used a hundred arts and opened new doors of tyranny.’ Such taxation must have produced a great hue and cry, especially among the cultivating classes and to deter them from abandoning their occupation, the government equaled the fee ‘on the transfer of land to the amount for which it was sold.’ The tax measures aggravated the cultivator condition to such a degree that for them ‘there seemed no way to live their lives and sustain themselves except by the grace of God.’

In fact in the taxation system of Dogra regime no product was too insignificant, no person too poor to contribute to the state. Saffron formed another monopoly, so was

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206 Sukhdev Singh Charak, Life and Times of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, Jammu, 1985, p. 32.
207 Bawa, Jammu Fox, p. 169.
208 Ibid.
210 Mirjanpuri, Tarikh-e-Kashmir, p. 331.
211 Ibid.
salt and the aromatic plant called *kot* including paper tobacco. Same was the case with brick-making and the dead was not buried save by licensed and “privileged” grave diggers [who also had to pay taxes]. There was a cess of from 4 to 20 *annas* levied on each house on the villages. Of course it is very rare, if not impossible, for a man to raise himself singlehandedly by his economic bootstraps to the level of productivity above and beyond that demanded by the ‘mandatory payments’. 

The helplessness of the peasant to resist the grinding oppression received the attention of the poets of the time like Wahab Parray, Abdul Ahad Azad, Gh. Ahmad Mahjoor, and many others. Wahab Parray (1845-1914) spoke out clearly in an outspoken manner the misfortunes of the cultivating classes and wrote:

> ‘How many oppressions of the time can I count?  
> The authoritarian rulers have steeped the *mulk* into chaos,  
> Anyone who is employed has to pay tax,  
> The plundering department is called *Nakdi Mahal* (cash only)  
> How many oppressions can I count on my fingers?  
> Every lion here has a hundred or more dogs with him to rip the people apart.’

Abdul Ahad Azad (1903-1948) in his poem ‘*Greeznama*’ (story of the peasant) has pathetically described the pith of the state of the peasantry in Kashmir and says:

> ‘God gave me life it is truly his kindness,  
> But except that my everything is my own toil and blood,  
> My heart is ruptured and I am ringing like a lute,  
> The age of slavery has shackled me like a snake,  
> This poison and fear as emaciated me,  
> In destitution, weakness, poverty and poor expression,  
> I am not swayed by any bodies’ progress or bravery,'
I have been created by God but their flesh and blood is made of my blood,
This didn’t irritate me earlier but now it causes irritation,
I glance at this age and look at my own self,
Those very people are my enemies, to whom I have dedicated my life,
The advocacy of the poor and peasants befits Azad,
How much I like and how much flow of their thoughts I have.’

As every person is the product of his social environment, so were these poets. Azad, like all the poets, was the child of his environment and, in the words of Bansi Nirdosh, it shaped his social consciousness. However, Kashmir, at that time, was an aching and ailing society, to which Azad provided a cure. Azad was born at a time when on all sides there was hunger, poverty, scarcity, narrow mindedness, insufficiency and helplessness. He hailed from a tenancy class family which was crushed in the grip of feudalism and jagirdari system. This class reflected a deep cultural degeneration and social demoralization. In such circumstances when ideas are suppressed and traditions limit social change, man is denied a happy existence and his deep sentiments are atrophied these poets from sub conscious, carry the drama into their own imaginations; if not vitiated by their own mental height, carry through intuitional knowledge to enlighten their future thought. Azad thus enlightened the people to understand the future and make it worthwhile. His thoughts reacted to the situations very well and composed verses to bring a better life to the Kashmiri.218

In fact behind the peasants back was a large phalanx of social groups, undermining his producing faculties to grow, with a feudal outlook on life. As Kingsly Devis has said these classes were in habituation to ‘profit by squeeze’219 giving nothing in return, the consequence of which was mass ‘peasant insolvency’ well depicted in the above quoted poetic stanza.

The ‘insolvent’ character of the peasantry is further illustrated by Mrs. Hervey, who while narrating the material conditions of the peasants, wrote, ‘they declare that no one dares to have cooking pots of brass or copper, earthen vassals are all they may keep

in their houses, to avoid being robbed by their sovereign still further. During the normal times the peasant could not dream of having a food stock which could suffice his basic necessities till he could harvest his crops...’ ‘It is sure’ asserts Lawrence ‘that the condition of the cultivators in Kashmir is infinitely worse than any other Native state of India.

In the backdrop of the undefined tax rate, constant fragmentation of holdings, and chronic poverty where subsistence took priority over investment, and rendered many cultivators unable to make ends meet, the peasantry of Kashmir couldn’t evolve well defined anti-feudal consciousness. However, wishing the abolition of the system of landlordism, they struggled passively for the restoration of their lost rights in land. Mr. Henvey records that ‘...insurrection in Kashmir is not to be looked for. Ages of wretchedness have emasculated the people. It is true, signs of desperation have occasionally shown themselves, and do still appear from time to time. Such signs are the incendiary fires which occurred in Srinagar, every night during the winter of 1878-79, the purpose of the incendiarists being to plunder the stores of rice which were believed to have been accumulated in the houses that were burnt.

To acknowledge the historical fact, the aim of the peasant’s struggle was to reduce the political and social weight of the land administration and jagirdari. However, when they failed they followed the path which the peasantry throughout the colonial India followed. The common method of resistance followed by the peasants was migration to Punjab. Letting land uncultivated, flight of the peasants from the villages as illustrated in the table below, showing how collections had fallen off in 252 villages, owing to the land having lately gone out of cultivation. The below mentioned figures gives the total:

221 'Note by Walter Lawrence on the Position of the Cultivating Classes in Kashmir.'
222 Mr. Henvey’s Note on the Famine in Kashmir, 1877-80’, Foreign Department (Secret), File No. 86, March 1883, NAI.
223 For details of the peasants’ methods of mobilization and resistance in colonial India, see Mridula Mukherjee’s Peasants in India’s Non-Violent Revolution Practice & Theory, Chapter Nine, pp. 394-419.
224 For example by spring 1879 there was no seed left to sow during the autumn season. In the meantime prices of food grains shot up, since the state was unable to prevent revenue officials from hoarding state grain, mostly maize and barley. Thousands of Kashmiris migrated to the Punjab. See Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 80.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Demand from 252 Villages (in rupees)</th>
<th>Collections (in rupees)</th>
<th>Remarks on the harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samvat 1937</td>
<td>3,88,613</td>
<td>3,45,031</td>
<td>Very good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1880 A.D.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>3,96,274</td>
<td>3,51,547</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>4,23,44</td>
<td>3,53,673</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>4,64,200</td>
<td>2,44,389</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>4,69,701</td>
<td>4,09,562</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>4,36,872</td>
<td>1,97,841</td>
<td>Poor harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>4,41,357</td>
<td>2,31,550</td>
<td>Fairly good harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944 (1887 A.D.)</td>
<td>4,41,403+44</td>
<td>2,48,369</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rs. 34,61,904</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rs. 23,81,962</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The oppression and exactions created such an economic environment that the peasants who under normal circumstances dreaded eviction from land had to be forcibly tied to the land. Occupancy rights not only lost their value but became occupancy obligations. Those very cultivatable fields which were once regarded as *anadatta* [lord of the flood] became shackles of captivity.

These villages scattered over 14 tehsils. How they broke down could be illustrated by citing an instance as below. The *khewat* of the village of Asham was fixed at Rs.1,275. The collections for *samvat* 1937 and *samvat* 1938 were Rupees 1271 and rupees 1,411. In *samvat* 1939 the village was sold by auction to a contractor for rupees 2,095 and the contractor fled after two years and for *samvat* 1943 and 1944, the collections were Rs. 553 and Rs. 782. Wingate says that, ‘when I saw the village its fine lands were mostly lying unsown and its houses empty. After enquiring why the cultivators don’t return I came to know that because of the outstanding balance against the village is enormous…last year found the Tahsildar trying to secure the entire crops of the miserable
few who were left in a vain attempt to about one third of the demand, but with the more likely result of ensuring the complete dissertation of the place.  

It is noteworthy to mention that the emphasis placed by James Scott on the right to subsistence in his study of the peasant’s revolts in south East Asia seems relevant with the peasantry of Kashmir, like the peasants in colonial India too, protected in various ways when their subsistence was threatened. When crops failed or famine stalked the land, or when prices crashed, or when they rose so much that the rural poor couldn’t buy enough food, protests broke out. The poorest sections looted bazars and withheld rents, others asked for reduction or remission in government taxation. These types of protests generally tended to be short lived, since it was usually an immediate reaction to a desperate situation.

The desperate situation of the peasants of Kashmir in the words of Walter Lawrence was that ‘the peasants were overworked, half starved, treated with hard words and hard blows, subjected to uneasy exactions and every species of petty tyranny…while in the cities a number of unwholesome and useless professions, and a crowd of lazy menials, pampered the vices or administered to the pride and luxury of the great.’ It was at the turn of the century in the post settlement era, in the thirties of the twentieth century, when the cultivator was somewhat redeemed of his serfdom and assured of some rights. In 1932, after the establishment of the Muslim Conference, the organization succeeded in widening its social space due its peasant oriented programmes, the manifestation of which can be seen in the ‘National Demand’ presented by the Conference in 1938.
3.5. Forced Labour:

‘Begar [forced Labour] is really the bottom of all the misery and mischief in Kashmir. Gilgit is the bugbear of the Kashmiris.’

‘Begar mean[t] to the Kashmiris far more than the mere impressment of labour, for under its comprehensive name every kind of demand for labour or property [was] taken but not paid for by the officials.’ The man liable to begar was an ‘outlaw’ without rights of any description, and begar was looked upon by officials as an incident of serfdom which entitled them to take all things, either labour and commodities, free of payment from the villagers. Such a system took out heart 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 to cultivating more common kinds of rice and cut down their fruit trees.

Forced labour, till the beginning of the twentieth century was the most pronounced feature of Kashmir administration. However, a clear distinction must be made between the forced labour employed for transport of goods and the labour used for production purposes. The latter is considered to be the essential ingredient of European feudalism. In Kashmir both forms of forced labour were present, in the economic organization of the post 1846 period.

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229 Foreign Department, Srinagar the 13th November 1889 (Demi official) from W.R Lawrence, Settlement officer Kashmir to Colonel R. P Nisbet, Resident, Kashmir, NAI.
230 Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 411.
231 Ibid., p. 413. The power wielded by the officials under the system of Mujawaza, by virtue of which they could deprive a village of its year’s food stocks, was great, but not so great as the power wielded by them in the levy of begar.
233 Ibid. Though there was no special laboring class in Kashmir, agricultural land being sufficiently available for the existing population. Whatever labour was available was available in the cities was exempt from begar and thus the whole burnt fell on the rural population, especially on the peasantry. Labour was mostly required to carry loads to Gilgit or render services to foreign visitors. Gilgit being a frontier district of Kashmir, the
The genesis of the corvee in Kashmir may be traced to very ancient times. The first reliable reference to it is found in Rajatarangni. King Samkaraverman (883-902), is said ‘to have given to this corvee a systematic organization (rudhabharodhi) and to have used it also for fiscal extortion’, though he was certainly not the first to resort to begar for transport purposes. During the time it was the harbinger of misery for the villagers.

It continued under the Sultanate, Mughals, Afghans and Sikhs in different forms. Sultan Shihab-ud-din enforced begar on the Hanjis [boatmen community]. They were obliged to serve him a week in every month, the practice which was later on abolished by Sultan Ali Shah. During the period men were forcibly employed for collecting Saffron and in return they received a certain quantity of salt as wages. Thus, the labour was forced but paid, although meagerly.

The Mughal king Akbar conquered Kashmir in 1586. Under the great Mughals the compulsory labour was without any doubt due from the people, but with this difference, that it didn’t take the form of unpaid Labour, as Lawrence observes, ‘that huge sums were paid by Akbar to the coolies who worked on the construction of the Hari Parbat fort, and the inscription on the Kathi Darwaza expressly states that no one was impressed and that all were paid. ‘Mah Karda ba kas begar nya’ implies no person worked free on this construction. Lawrence further argues that another couplet on the same inscription states that the emperor furnished one core and nine lakhs of rupees and two hundred Indian artisans for the work. The durability of some of the buildings of the Mughals suggests that the work was paid, for buildings constructed by forced and unpaid labour didn’t last long.

There is evidence that the institution of forced labor got revival in Kashmir under the Mughals too. Iqtad khan the last Mughal Governor sent by Emperor Jahangir to

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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 begaris, therefore, were pressed into service as human carriage of load. What made it forced labour was that it was taken, against the will, when the peasants used to be busy with their farming operations. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, pp. 413-14.

235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 ibid.
240 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 196.
Kashmir proved to be very cruel who revived the old practice. But Shahjahan dismissed him and abolished the iniquitous custom of begar. Aurangzeb during his reign seems to have been solicitous of the laborers. Bernier the French traveler informs that on the occasion of Aurangzeb’s visit to Kashmir 30,000 porters were employed to carry the luggage of the camp from Bhimber to Kashmir, in those days however, the porters received crowns for every hundred pounds weight carried from Bhimber to Kashmir. The peasants were coming voluntarily in the hope of earning a little money. But the period of our study when it was rumored that transport was needed for Gilgit there used to be the general stampede among the villagers.

The institution of begar continued both during the Afghan and Sikh period with utmost rigour. Moorcroft has given a graphic account of the Sikh period and states that people accompanying them were seized as unpaid porters, and were not only driven along the road by a cord tying them together by the arms, but their legs were bound with ropes at night to prevent their escape. But during the period of our study the institution of begar assumed dangerous proportions. The state benefited from this sale of the peasant labour both for the purpose of the state as well as for foreign tourists. It was a system in which peasants at any time be drafted into the service of the state known as begar. It entailed the services such as carrying loads of rations and other supplies to Gilgit for the state, or for foreign visitors on their journey around the valley or for royal processions from one part of the state to another. Maharaja Gulab Singh himself employed forced labour on more than one occasion for carrying his baggage from Kashmir to Jammu.

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241 Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 196.
242 Ibid.
243 Ibid., p. 114.
245 Saraf, Kashmiris Fight For Freedom, p. 273. The system assumed extremely dreadful proportions in Kashmir valley under the early Dogras mainly because of the frontier wars for the conquest and the consequent necessity of providing the troops on the move as well as the huge military establishments in the conquered territories with adequate supplies.
246 Chitralekha Zutshi, Languages of Belonging, p. 66.
247 Bawa, Jammu Fox, p. 169.
During the 1853 Gilgit camping, each cultivator had to carry at the rate of eight *traks* of load per head, consisting of rations and supplies for the soldiers in Gilgit. Peasants’ were reduced to animals of burden, without any hope of payment for such services. Only in the case of requisition for Begar being made by foreign visitors could the peasants expect a payment of \( \frac{1}{4} \) *annas* for every stage of carrying a load. \(^{249}\) Huge complaints were made by the people of Gurez to Maharaja Pratap Singh during his Gilgit road inspection tour regarding the oppression of the officials and the wages which they did not get for the labour they are called upon to perform. \(^{250}\) It further testifies that it was an unpaid labour. The whole demand of *begar* was thrown on the khalsa peasants as along with city and town population Pandits, Pirzadas, Sikhs and the peasants of the privileged right holders were exempt from *begar*. \(^{251}\) It acted as demoralizing and almost intolerable burden on a large section of the agricultural population. \(^{252}\) It was really bottom of all misery and mischief in Kashmir. The constant preoccupation of Kashmiri cultivator was to escape from it as it was levied without consideration either for the ability of individual families to spare the labor otherwise required for agricultural purposes or for the particular phase of the agricultural cycle in which it was demanded.

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\(^{248}\) H.R. Pirie, a traveler, describes the vagaries and nature of the Gilgit road: ... a military road which has overcome such difficulties in its making as no other road in the world has to contend with. For besides the great forces of nature arrayed against it, impregnable against cliffs, rivers in flood, avalanches of snow in winter and of rocks the rest of the year, snowstorms and freezing winds meaning certain death to those overtaken by them with famine ever in waiting to swoop down on the workers should any one blunder on delay in sending up the long caravans of grain from the far distant base... A road that has taken a tremendous toll of the lives of men, the author says, 'the first time I went on it, an old Kashmiri transport driver told me, 'when I was a boy of sixteen, I wept much, because on both sides of the road lay so many dead men.' The traveler says at the best of the times one comes to places where the wheeling vultures gather over a baggage pony which has succumbed to the hardships of the road and there are still terrible bits near Gilgit where all the resources of science are powerless, after any great storm the road is carried away, and can never be mended without loss of life.' See, H.R. Pirie, *Kashmir the Land of Streams and Solitudes*, London 1909, pp. 64-71.

\(^{249}\) Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging*, p. 66.

\(^{250}\) 'Diary of an Inspection Tour to Gilgit Road by The Maharaja Pratap Singh,' Civil and military Gazette Press, Lahore, 1893, p. 23.

\(^{251}\) ‘Logan Report on the Financial Conditions of Kashmir’, Foreign Department, Secret-E, Pros., June 1892, Nos. 133-135, NAI, p. 29. Lawrence argues that in consequence of these exemptions, out of a total population of 814,241, 52,216 men were free because they were Hindus, 4,092 because they were Sikhs and 114,170 because they were Muslims residing in the city and the towns, the groups exempted were the cultivators working on the land of Kashmiri Pandits, Jagirdars and Dharmarath department. Out of total population of 814,241 persons, 350,000 were exempt from *begar* by rule, and that another 50,000 were exempt by favour. See Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 412.

\(^{252}\) Foreign Department, Secret-E, May 1893, File Nos.112-125, NAI.
Why it assumed dangerous proportion during the Dogra rule? Why not during the preceding dynasties? It was mainly due to the fact that the earlier part of the Dogra rule as already mentioned was worked by an intense military action in the border areas for which thousands of villagers were seized for carrying supplies to Chilas and Gilgit for putting down an insurrection in Chilas, a territory adjoining Gilgit where hundreds of Dogra soldiers were killed in a futile attempt to occupy the Chilas fort. When news of the disaster reached Srinagar, the Maharaja made frantic efforts to reinforcements to the battle ground. Resorting to begar, he rounded thirty four men from Kashmir and Jammu and sent them to Chilas. In the fever of excitement Gulab Singh even conscripted children but subsequently spared most of them from the ordeal. Foodstuffs were often collected without payment, and on one occasion three to four hundred men who had gathered at the Jamia Masjid for the Friday prayers, where marched to the Hari parbat fort to carry ammunition destined for Chilas to the boats in the lake below. It is natural that such actions were deeply resented by the subjects but their complaints fell on deaf ears. Referring to Gulab Singh’s complete preoccupation with the revolt, Saif ud din recorded, ‘nowadays Maharaja Sahib is, day and night, worrying and talking about Chilas. There is nothing else on his tongue except this subject.’

Lawrence records that, ‘Gilgit to the Kashmiri is a constant terror. When it was rumored that transport was wanted to convey 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 inhuman punishments dealt out to men who demurred to leaving their homes for two or three months with the prospect of death from cold or starvation.’ On entering in a village a traveler Mrs. Hervey records that, ‘while entering I heard nothing but weeping and on inquiry, found that two hundred villagers were then being taken away to Gilgit. It is really distressing to hear nothing but mourning

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253 R.G. Taylor Punjab Political Diaries vol., vi, pp. 81-82, NAI.
254 ‘Saif-ud-Din Papers’, 31st July 1851, Vol.4 fols. 45/1, 51/1, 55/2, 56/2, 61/2, 61/9, RPD, Srinagar.
255 Ibid., August 1, 1851 vol. 4, fol. 69/2.
256 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 413.
and lamentation in every village one enters. Generally it gives birth to pessimism which ultimately snatches one's sense of self, sense of being and ultimately sensibility.

Lt. Colonel Taylor found about ten instances of begar in Kashmir in which a large number of men were engaged under compulsion by the government. In the Lal Assessment report Lawrence claims that '[he] dwelt on the fact that in assessing villages [he] had to deal with the half time labourers, and it [wa]s no exaggeration to say that the cultivator had on the average to do ten days of forced labour in every month.' While making enquiries into this question of begar he asked the cultivators why they objected to carrying a load for four annas a day to which they replied that, 'the loss caused to their crops by their absence at a critical time is not compensated by a wage of four annas.'

Lawrence describes begar as one of the worst forms of tyranny in Kashmir and entirely hostile to the satisfactory working of any revenue system in the country. A system which in a thinly populated country suddenly carried off the whole able-bodied population of a village or forced a cultivator away from his home or his fields, when perhaps they needed his presence and labour the most...

Narrating the collection and how they were collected and loaded Tyndale Biscoe writes, 'that at Bandipora they were collected and loaded up. The only rations allowed them was a seer of rice per day, this had to carry, plus the straw for making their straw shoes, 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 wild inhabitants of the inhospitable region. The grandfather of one of servants, who was sent there, was exchanged for a Chinese dog, but later on he escaped.' Lawrence argues that, the chief thing that breaks

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258 Foreign Department, Secret-E, February, 13th Nov. 1889, Nos. 295-326, 1891, NAI.
259 Ibid.
260 Foreign Department, Secret-E, February, 29th Jan. 1890, No.15-l dated Lahore, 1891, NAI.
261 Ibid.
262 Ibid. Dr. Arthur Neve in his book *Thirty years in Kashmir* writes, 'For many years after I came to the country the mere name of Gilgit struck terror in to the Kashmiri. For him it had the most alarming meaning. It spoke of forced labour, frost bite on the lofty passes, and valleys of death, where the camps were haunted by cholera and starvation. Early in April news reached that the frontier tribes were on the war path, and order was issued for a levy of 5,000 porters to accompany the two regiments sent to reinforce the garrisons. Neve says, that I was at Islamabad endeavoring to fight an epidemic of cholera by sanitation and noticed coolies collecting from all the surrounding regions, each with his blanket, spare gross shoe, his carrying crutch, and light frame of sticks and rope in which to carry the load upon his back and I was present on the great
down a village is begar and in order to escape from it, a village will submit to any loss or hardship. He goes on to say that in 1887 impressed labour was required for Gilgit, and the rumor of the loss of life on the road filled the villagers with alarm. Three villages were sold to a Pandit Badri Nath, an ex-governor for sums varying between Rs.50 and Rs.63. The amount of the purchase money was of course ridiculous, but the real consideration was exemption from begar. A fourth village was sold to a Hindu held in veneration as an ascetic. He gave Rs 50 for a very fine village and obtained from the district officer an order of exemption for forced labour. The fifth village was a very large and wealthy one near Baramulla. It was bought by the Tahsildar for Rs.300 Chilki and was exempted by his influence from forced labour. The Tahsildar Badrinath didn’t consider it necessary to disburse the Rs 300 from his own pocket, but deducted the amount from the arrears entered against the village. It led to the process of extermination, depopulation and dehumanization.

While not ignoring the numerous references about the Gilgit begar—the most dreadful form of forced labour in Kashmir—one cannot simply blame it on the Maharaja’s shoulders only. Gilgit was very much important for the British—probably more than what it was for the Maharaja—and in spite of that forced labour was resorted to. The European sources have left no stone unturned in criticizing the maharaja but the British officials have simply been divested of their responsibility in carrying out this practice. The only instances where we find a few words written against the British for this institution is in the carrying of luggage; in the same breath, the writers claim that the porters were paid. But whether this assertion is true or not, we do not know due to paucity of sources for the given period.

Another dimension of begar was the rule which exempted all jagir and Dharmarath villages, all tenants of chakdars, and Hindus from begar, and put the whole burden of

concourse on a green meadow in front of the mosque when a sort of farewell service was held for those starving on this perilous journey. Loud was the sobbing of many and fervid the demeanour of all as, led by the mullah, they intoned their prayers and chanted some of their special Ramzan penitential psalms, even braver men than the Kashmiris might well have been agitated at such a time, when taking farewell of their loved ones! Who will till their fields? What would happen during their long absence to their wives and children? Too what perils would they themselves be exposed in the crowded bivouacs and snowy passes of that deadly Gilgit district? Arthur Neve, Thirty years in Kashmir, London, pp. 139-40.

263 Note by Walter Lawrence on the Position of the Cultivating Classes in Kashmir.
forced labour on the Muslim cultivators of khalsa villages. The chakdars, chiefly Pandits, who were given lands for cultivation on easy terms. A condition of the grant was that the chakdars should import cultivators or get them from the city. Lawrence says that I found many chakdars estates cultivated entirely by men who formerly lived in khalsa villages and paid revenue to the state. They left their villages in order to escape from begar, and they no doubt were more comfortable on a chakdars estate than they ever were in their old village. It has also been reported that as a rule the cultivation in Jagir and Dharmarath villages, and on chakdars estate was somewhat better than that which was found in khalsa villages.

The institution of begar provided great opportunities to revenue officials to squeeze the cultivators in lieu of the exemption from begar Wingate writes that the way of collecting coolies is more discontent than is necessary. A requisition was made say for instance 500 coolies...while putting forwarding the requisition, the Tahsildar doubles the number. His emissaries quadruple it, and so a village that ought to supply five coolies is asked for twenty, fifteen men have to buy themselves off after paying a bribe of two annas per head. And the cultivators who couldn’t pay for their release would go to horrific lengths to escape their impressment for tasks of the state. The villagers used to pay Rs. 70 to 90 per head in order to purchase their exemption. In fact begar had been a demoralizing and almost intolerable burden on a large section of the agricultural

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265 See Wingate Report, p. 37. Mirdu Rai argues that this aspect ultimately promoted the many cultivators to leave khalsa (government) land to work on begar free lands and those Muslim cultivators who worked on the Dharmarath villages in order to obtain release from begar, for that they had to pay a price as Lawrence argues that, the existence of Dharmarath villages constituted a divided authority in the state an ‘imperium in imperio’ as Dogra’s had placed Dharmarath villages within a separate judicial authority over which its own officials presided, and the vast majority of the Dharmarath villages used to be Muslim cultivators, this meant says Rai their subjection to the laws of an institution with a very clear Hindu religious identity. See Rai, Hindu Rulers Muslim Subjects, pp. 155-56.

266 Foreign Dept., Secret-E, February, 29th Jan.1890, No.15-I dated Lahore, 1891, NAI.

267 Ibid.


269 Foreign Dept., Secret-E, February, 29th Jan.1890, No.15-I dated Lahore, 1891, NAI.

270 Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 413.

271 Ibid.
population…and its abuses were so deep rooted and flourished which ultimately stopped its abolition for a long period of time.  

Under its comprehensive name other kinds of demand of labor were also made. It consisted of requisitions of village produce and was a form of purveyance on behalf of officials. Under this system the peasant was subjected to labour demands such as building houses for nobility, and to variety of regular and irregular levies, some of them very onerous. For example it was normal for the peasant to supply wood grass, milk, poultry, grain, blankets and an occasional pony, cows and sheep free of cost to officials' and higher officials would build houses in the city or cultivate waste lands through the unpaid labour of the villagers.

The institution of begar proved detrimental in other aspects too. Sometimes the sons of the deceased revenue defaulter’s were subjected to begar for repayment of state dues by the officials. It implies that begar had got hereditary nature during the period, a feature not associated with the preceding ruling dynasties. The peasantry was subjected to road construction, carrying of official carriage both public as well as private and to cut wood from the jungle for the royal use. The practice virtually reduced the cultivator hopeless and created in him a pessimistic outlook of life.

The institution of begar had, not unexpectedly, a pernicious effect on the socio economic structure of Kashmir. It led to the destruction of the property rights of the cultivators and reduced them to a state close to serfdom. It led to the displacement and migration of the cultivators which resulted in a total dislocation of agricultural and other

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272 From the Resident in Kashmir to the Vice-President J&K State No.1028 dated, Sialkot, the 25th March 1892, Foreign Department, Secret-E, NAI.
273 Lawrence, The Valley of Kashmir, p. 414.
274 Ibid.
276 Political & General Department, File No. 213, 1913, JKA-J.
278 Hangloo, Agrarian System of Kashmir, pp. 117-18. Ernest F. Neve writes that, 'every year the levy of coolies for Gilgit placed in the hands of Tahsildar (the district Magistrate) great powers of oppression. And from the chief of the local administration down to the humblest peon of the tehsil this was an unfailing source of income. Meanwhile, the poor and friendless, or those who had incurred the wrath of the authorities, were seized and sent off on the hate task of carrying loads a thirteen days journey over rough mountain tracks to Gilgit. Their condition was absolutely little better than that of the slaves. See E.F. Neve, Beyond the Pir Panjal, Srinagar, reprint, 2003, pp. 53-4.
economic activities. It was an activity mostly conducted in the summer months when the passes remained open at a time when the peasant was supposed to be present in their fields, but owing to his absence rendered him from poverty to impoverishment, incapable of even paying his share of revenue to the state.\textsuperscript{279} It acted as an obstruction in the growth and development of an organized labour class in Kashmir and was detrimental both from the social and economic point of view. It was the deprivation of one’s self and self of being.

It has often been maintained by the historians of Kashmir’s modern history that in the late eighties of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, after the intervention of the British colonists in the administrative domain of Kashmir, the evils of \textit{begar} began to decrease. The construction of the Gilgit road and the opening of the Jhelum valley road in 1890 might have helped in some measure in reducing the instances of \textit{begar}. While Lawrence attempted to bring a fundamental change in the system of \textit{begar}. While Lawrence attempted to bring a fundamental change in the system of \textit{begar} on the one hand, but on other hand he justified the continuation of the system of \textit{begar}. He suggested that it was necessary at any rate for a time, for the extension of improved communications and good roads in Kashmir.\textsuperscript{280} It is understood that British apologists tried to project themselves as sympathizers of the people of the land but at the same time did not hesitate in perpetrating human demoralization through the practice of \textit{begar}.

It should also be borne in mind that despite the Darbar’s orders regarding the ban on forced labour and claim of the some of the writers that it was abolished in 1920,\textsuperscript{281} the case does not seem to be so. The practice likely continued with a modification in its nature, till the late thirties of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{282} With a new dimension, a \textit{begar} cess of one \textit{anna} per rupee in Jammu and half an \textit{anna} in Kashmir was levied.\textsuperscript{283} Though the Glancy commission reports mentions that females were exempted\textsuperscript{284} yet there is evidence

\textsuperscript{279} E.F. Knight, \textit{Where Three Empires Meet}, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{280} From Colonel R. Parry Nisbet to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Dept., Secret-E, February, 1890, NAI.
\textsuperscript{282} \textit{Glancy Commission Report}, p. 39. The report mentions that in many cases officials of the Maharaja flouted the orders and villagers were often employed by them for carrying their baggage free of charge over long distances.
\textsuperscript{283} Translation of Memorandum dated 13\textsuperscript{th} May 1892, submitted by the Revenue Member to the State Council Resolution No. 4, May 1892, Vide Resolution No.24, dated 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 1892, NAI.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid.
in which women are shown weeding a field while a Dogra soldier is keeping a vigil on them.\textsuperscript{285} Although the orders for its abolition were issued in 1891, and in 1920 an effort was made to abolish it altogether, it continued in various forms up to 1947. One such form of forced labour was the construction and repair of canals and embankments,\textsuperscript{286} which were constructed without the free will and payment. In sum, forced labour gave a great setback to the emergence of revenue-paying peasantry the consequence of which, the absence of a stable cultivating class in Kashmir. This point has been emphasized by Wingate\textsuperscript{287} as well.

After probing the available data on the subject of agrarian structure of Kashmir, one reaches to the conclusion that economically speaking the subjects became the victims of an unregulated economic system and the cultivating classes had very little, if any, capital powers. They comprised impoverished communities that lived a marginal existence. It was not only economic impoverishment that they faced but without exception these people were economically powerless. The statistical definition of poverty changed with time, but they always lived on the margin, with a bare minimum of land, calories, education, medical care, worldly goods and security In other words, these people had no way of advancing up the social ladder because they lacked nutrition, education and sanctuary—the commodities necessary for a group to enjoy economic mobility. Kashmiri people in general and the working class people in particular didn’t have these opportunities until the fruits of the national movement were realized. Years of struggle and poverty played an important role in defining Kashmir in the face of an awakening that was renowned for its affluence. Yet through this struggle there were leaders who tried to account for and fix the identity of Kashmir and its people.

\textsuperscript{285} See Illustration 1.

\textsuperscript{286} M.Y. Ganai, *Kashmir’s Struggle for Independence*, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{287} *Wingate Report*, p. 38.