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## Changing Labour Patterns in Kashmir Agriculture: A Case Study of Village Bugam

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### **Abstract:**

*Agrarian society is predominantly based on agriculture and agriculture involves the cultivation of various crops for meeting the basic need of food for the survival of mankind. The productive activity on land cannot take place without the application of labour. The application of labour involves the interaction of individuals, whose rights and obligations are socially defined. This in turn gives a particular pattern to the interaction of the people in the process of productive activity. Such a pattern of relations give social orientation to the productive activity i.e. agriculture. These groups of people are drawn into institutional framework of relationships with each other in the process of productive activity in order to meet their food, income and occupational requirements. The various labour patterns mostly used in the cultivation of land are family labour system, hired labour system, exchange labour system and tenancy or sharecropping. The present study is descriptive in nature and has been carried out in line with the case study research strategy and the village has been taken as a case for conducting this study. It is intended in this study to discuss various labour patterns used in the utilization of land in Kashmir valley at micro level also to analyze the various changes that have occurred in it.*

**Key words:** Agrarian Society, Agrarian Relations, Labour Migration, Subsistence Agriculture, Crop Pattern

### **1. Introduction**

Agrarian society is predominantly based on agriculture and agriculture involves the cultivation of various crops for meeting the basic need of food for the survival of mankind.<sup>1</sup> It not only provides food for its people, but agriculture and agriculture related activities are the largest supplier of self employment opportunities, for people living within agrarian societies with low level of education and skills. The whole process of utilization of land by man for fulfilling the food and income requirements takes place in the network of social relations. The problems centering on the management of land are of two kinds, those dealing with technological arrangement and those dealing with social arrangement.<sup>2</sup> The use of technological arrangements in the process of cultivation takes place within the social arrangements. The cultivation of land involves various labour patterns depending upon the various factors like the climate, available technology, cropping pattern and purpose of the cultivation of land etc. The various labour patterns mostly used in the cultivation of land includes family labour system, hired labour system, exchange labour system and tenancy or sharecropping. Each main pattern may be combined in the same region, in the same village and even within the same holding.

The cultivation of different crops involves not only different technologies but also different patterns of work.<sup>3</sup> In each community the nature of work that requires to be done is shaped broadly by the technology available to it. But the manner in which work is allocated among the different members of the community – is a matter of social organization rather than the technology.<sup>4</sup> The division of labor within the social organization is mostly done on the basis of age and sex, social strata and on the basis of nature of work. Division of work on the basis of age and sex is present in all societies. Throughout India, ploughing is invariably regarded as men's work, where as weeding and transplantation is regarded as women's work. Harvesting may be done by both men and women.<sup>5</sup> Where production is organized on the basis of family labour not all members of the family do the same kind of work. The division of work can be done on the basis of age and sex. The women and aged persons within the family mostly carry out the agricultural operations that require little

<sup>1</sup> A.R. Desia. 1979. Rural Sociology in India. Bombay: Popular Prakashan. p.25.

<sup>2</sup> Andre Beteille.1974. Studies in Agrarian Social Structure. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p.25.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

physical energy. Within the family sex based division of labour may be quite different from one region to another and for different crops in the same region. When new crops are introduced, this may lead to a change in the labour within the family. Even when members of the family cultivate their own land there are operations which almost everywhere require the help of members of other families.<sup>6</sup> This is performed on the basis of exchange labour system. The manner in which members of a family divide their tasks when they work on their own land may be different from what they do when they work as sharecroppers on someone else's land. In line with the division of work on the basis of social strata, sociologists maintain that the caste structure is the clue, self cultivation being common in areas where peasant castes are dominant.

Tenancy and share cropping introduce between at least two different families, those of the landowners and the tenants and the share croppers. The two sets of people are linked together by rights and obligations which show a wide range of variations. Similarly, the relation between land owners and wage labourers may vary considerably.<sup>7</sup> The use of sharecroppers and use of wage labourers is common in areas where non cultivating castes own the land. Indian agricultural communities are highly stratified and one can reasonably expect some relationship between the caste of stratification and the division of labour. It is clear from the above discussion that the land can be utilized for cultivation in different ways with the help of various labour patterns. The labour pattern used in a particular region is determined by various factors like climate, cropping pattern, technology, caste, purpose of the cultivation etc. It is intended in this study to discuss various labour patterns used in the utilization of land in Kashmir that is geographically and socio economically different from the rest of the country and thus needs special attention in order to explore the labour patterns used in the agriculture of the region. . The purpose of this study is to understand the social organization of land in terms of labour patterns of region and also to analyze the various changes that have occurred in it.

## 2. Field Setting

The study was carried out in village Bugam, an interior village in Tehsil Chadoora, of District Budgam in Central Kashmir. The village lies at a distance of 16 kilometers from its district headquarters (Budgam) and 4 kilometers from its tehsil headquarters (Chadoora). It lies at distance of almost 15 kilometers from the summer capital of J & K state, Srinagar. Land is the main source of livelihood and income of the villagers. Bugam is a multi-caste village and people of each caste are directly or indirectly linked with the land. There are large landholding castes, small landholding castes and also landless castes. The village is famous for olericulture i.e. vegetable cultivation. The village is being credited for flourishing the vegetable cultivation in whole of the tehsil Chadoora and is taken as a modal village in the region in vegetable cultivation. The cultivation of vegetables in the village is a very old land based activity but cultivation of vegetables on commercial level in village is the post 1980's process. The change from subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture changed the whole socio-economic structure of the village. This change in turn has much significance in other villages of the area.

## 3. Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature and has been carried out in line with the case study research strategy and the village has been taken as a case for conducting this study. While following the case study research design; the researcher has used oral history interviews, non participant observation, and unstructured interviews as the research methods. Oral history interviews were used to collect the data about the labour patterns prevailed in the village in past times. These interviews were followed by the method of observation. Through this method researcher covered a wide range of agricultural operations. Such observations were necessary for becoming acquainted with the various stages of work associated with the cultivation of a particular crop; the knowledge of natural conditions and its application to the processes of cultivation; the techniques used, agricultural implements and kind of fertilizers used, the organization of time, the relations between inter household members and intra household members and also relations between migrant labourers with the villagers. The observation was supplemented with the informal, unstructured interviews in order to gain information not available by observation. These interviews were carried sometimes during the observation or sometimes immediately after the observation for more clarification about the already observed aspects of the village. These interviews were carried both in the fields during working and also at home. The main objective of the study is to analyze the systems of labour patterns as used in the village agriculture. It is also intended to analyze the factors that flourished the process of labour migration in the village agriculture. It also focuses to highlight the overall picture of labour patterns and changes in it.

## 4. Labour Patterns in Village: Past Context

The land in the studied village was utilized for the cultivation of various crops. But the major portion of land was utilized for the cultivation of paddy. Land in village was most suited for paddy cultivation in terms of availability of water, capability of soil in retaining the water, level of the land and also production of the crop. The land in the village named as *Amer maidan*, *Cursion*, *Batanaml*, *Namal*, *Naubugh Kha*, *Pankis Kha*, *Pachan*, *Batekha*, *Telwan Kha*, *Shalikhar*, *Bronde Kha* all were under the paddy cultivation. Only a small portion of land lacking the facility of irrigation because of its height was excluded from rice cultivation. This portion of land was being mostly used for the cultivation of maize, orchards and in few cases *red chilies* and latter on some portion of this land was given on lease to the Killen Owner for the purpose of its leveling and also getting money for a period of time. Such a cropping pattern dominated by the paddy cultivation was result of various factors like climatic constraints, quality of soil, and more

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Andre Beteille.1974. Studies in Agrarian Social Structure. Delhi: Oxford University Press. p.31.

importantly need for food grains by the peasant household. The cropping pattern dominated by the paddy cultivation persisted in the village till to 1980 and it was paddy cultivation that was shaping the agrarian social structure of the village. The agricultural in the village was characterized by the simple division of labour and almost every household was following similar pattern of agricultural operations in the cultivation process. The village was almost self sufficient. Most of the needs of the villagers were met within the village. In the cultivation of land by the peasant, whatever he required was available within his village like labourers, agricultural implements and their repairing, plough share for ploughing the land. He used to cultivate very few crops and the seeds required for these crops were also met within the peasant's household. He was very less dependent upon the market especially in terms of his agriculture. He very often pay visit to the market for buying agricultural implements or any other kind of agricultural need.

The cultivation of various crops like paddy, mustard and different kinds of vegetables in village was largely based on 'family labour system' or 'self cultivation' followed by the 'exchange labour system'. The agriculture in village was featured by the presence of joint family system based on large and undivided family members. The most of the agricultural operations were carried out by the family members of the household. The family was both as a unit of production and also as a unit of consumption. The family members were typically associated with the land. The lack of options other than agriculture in terms of livelihood and occupation had constrained the village people with the land. The elder member of the household used to govern the agricultural operations within the family. All the family members were living, within a single household and the property was kept undivided. According to the census 1961 there were only 169 households within the village occupying the land of 5016 kanal of land and the same size of land is now occupied by 492 households as per census 2011. This indicates the presence of joint family system within the village in past. The different agricultural operations were carried out on the basis of division of labour among the household members. Within the household the division of labour was mostly done on the basis of sex and age. The women and the aged persons mostly carried light and simple operations. The women of the household were mostly carrying out the household activities like cooking food, cleaning house, rearing cattle and milking the cows. They were also participating in various agricultural operations like transplanting of paddy, harvesting of paddy, wheat, maize and cultivation of vegetables. The cultivation of vegetables for fulfilling the consumption needs of the peasant household was one of the primary agricultural activities of the women. Cultivation and supervising the kitchen gardens was among her daily routines with the onset of the agricultural season till to the snow fall. Women used to enjoy the cultivation of vegetables, as it was easy and carried out on small pieces of land. However, the time spent by the women in the agricultural operations other than vegetable cultivation was very limited. While the agricultural operations that were arduous like ploughing, dweeding, threshing paddy, wheat, irrigating fields were carried out by the men of the family. The agricultural operations within the village were almost homogeneous and every peasant family was carrying out these agricultural operations on the same pattern.

Moreover, there were agricultural operations like transplanting of paddy seedlings, harvesting of crops, threshing of paddy or wheat, grinding of paddy, bundling of paddy and wheat that were labour intensive and time specific. Even the members of joint family were not sufficient to carry out these operations themselves. In village a particular peasant family used to carry out a particular agriculture operations on a particular day without any gaps. Suppose a peasant family decided to transplant paddy seedlings, the family will prefer to finish the process within a day or two days without any delay. But the family was based on limited family labourers and the operation required large number of labour force. In such a situation the same family used to invite the members of other family to help them in carrying out the particular agricultural operation within a desired period of time. The family that used the service of the member of the other family in turn used to help the same family in the agricultural operations. Such an arrangement was based on exchange of labour without any exchange of money or kind and locally was known as '*palzun*'. The exchange labour system was other important feature of the agriculture in village. Such an arrangement not only helps in carrying out the agricultural operations but also establishes the agrarian relations among the members of different families and makes the one peasant family interdependent upon other households in terms of labour requirement. These two types of labour arrangements were prevalent in the agriculture of the village and such arrangements depict the self sufficiency of village in terms of labour required for utilizing the land.

The other aspect of division of labour was caste based. Bugam is a multi-caste village and people of each caste are directly or indirectly linked with the land. There are large landholding castes, small landholding castes and also landless castes. The household belonging to particular caste was having its own occupation. The households of artisan castes like *teeli*, *najar*, *hajam*, *monchi* used to render the various services to the households of peasant castes like *lone*, *dar*, *mir*. They in turn used to give these people the food grains. Thus there was division of labour in the village on the caste basis. However, the households belonging to different castes were dependent upon each other. They were tied with each other with the relations of reciprocity and interdependence. The agriculture in village continued to be carried on with these two labour patterns of family laboring or self cultivation and exchange labour system till the coming of olericulture in village at commercial level. The shift from self sufficiency to commercialization of agriculture was accompanied with series of changes within the agriculture the village

##### **5. Changes in Labour Pattern in Village Agriculture**

In subsistence based agriculture in village, the agricultural operations were carried out without any external pressure like that of market. The family members with the help of neighbors were cultivating land for themselves. The agricultural operations especially in paddy cultivation were much enjoyed by the village people. In whole of the production process of land the village was acting as a functional unit. The agriculture in Bugam in terms of workforce was self sufficient till to year 2000 A.D. The land was cultivated mostly on the basis on self cultivation and exchange labour arrangements. The most important factor in changing the labor pattern in village was the change from subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture. The subsistence agriculture dominated by the paddy cultivation was based on simple division of labour and the agricultural operations were time specific. Most of the land in the village

was wet in nature and meant for only single cropping. So less labour was used in the cultivation process. With change in crop pattern, the farmers changed the structure of land from wet land meant for paddy cultivation by land leveling and soil filling in order to make it suited for the cultivation of vegetables. Such, a conversion of land make the mixed and multiple cropping possible in the village. This change in turn make the agricultural operations more labor intensive. The commercial based agriculture also opened the other livelihood options for the villagers like vegetable dealers, vegetable vendors, drivers, , this lead to further decrease in labour force in the village . So the farmer of the village searched for other options in terms of labour requirement for the agriculture. This opened the way for coming of hired labour system in the village agriculture and was met by the labour migrants. With change in cropping pattern from traditional paddy cultivation to vegetable and horticultural activity, the income of the farmers got increased and they begin to invest their savings from the agricultural in other socio-economic pursuits mostly in the education of their children, purchasing various commercial machines and vehicles and other income generating units like shops etc. This in turn decreases the availability of workforce within the village for the agriculture as happened to be in past. In addition to this, the process of education fostered among the educated persons of the village the attitude of occupation other than village.

#### **6. Labor Migration and Village Agriculture**

The feature of self sufficiency in terms of workforce of the agriculture in village Bugam got changed with the coming of agricultural labour migrants almost in the year 2000.<sup>8</sup> These agricultural labourers came from within the state and also from outside state. State laborers came from Shopian, Rajouri and Poonch areas and mostly include people of Gujjar community. The labourers from outside state mostly came from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal etc. These labor migrants came from rural areas and migrate to rural areas. Thus is Rural to Rural migration in nature. These migrant agricultural labourers are seasonal and came mostly in the month of April and left the village in the month of November. The process of coming of migrants in the village was slow in the beginning in terms of their number and time spent in the village. The rate of migration increased subsequently in terms of their number and time spent in the village and now has become the permanent feature of the agriculture in Bugam. There are very few farmer households, not hiring these migrant labourers in the cultivation of their land. The dependence of village farmers in terms of agriculture varies from household to household. There are households who are least dependent on the migrant labourers, such type of households are joint families and have labour force within the household. There are households who are totally dependent on the migrant labourers, such type of families are nuclear and their members are engaged with non agricultural activities like education, government services etc.

#### **7. Wages and Working Pattern**

These migrant labourers mostly work in agriculture fields and at times they also do non agricultural activities mostly construction works. Some migrant labourers prefer non agricultural activities than agricultural activities and perform these works within the village. The availability of work and high wages are the main reasons behind their migration. The rate of wages has changed from time to time and during the period of my fieldwork, these labourers were paid Rs 350 per day. From the beginning of their migration in 2000 A.D., the rate of their wages had increased from Rs 120 to Rs 350 at the present time. Besides, the wages in cash they are also given two times food and two times tea in a working day. The wages for these agricultural migrant laborers are fixed in consensus with the opinions of the laborers. The rates are not fixed forcibly but after a negotiation between the two parties. These labourers work on different arrangements within the village. They sometimes work on daily basis and are paid at the end of each working day. Another pattern of their work in the village is on the basis of contract. In this pattern these migrant labourers make a contract with the vegetable dealers of the village for a particular time period, the period mostly ranges from April to the ending of October. The rate of their wages is less as compared to the daily based labourers but in this arrangement they do not have to search for work for this period of time. They are also provided shelter and food by the vegetable dealer. The recent emerging work pattern of these migrant labourers is contract based work locally known as *theka*. This contract is done by these migrant labourers with the farmers. In this pattern these migrant labourers fix a rate of particular agriculture operation. This pattern is mostly specific to the potato extraction and paddy cultivation. During the period of my fieldwork they have fixed Rs 700 per kanal for extraction of potatoes from the land, Rs1000 per kanal for harvesting and bundling of paddy.

In whole of the village it is very difficult to find any land owning household that does not rely on the hired migrant labourers in the cultivation process. However, the dependence of land owning households upon hired migrant labourers varies from household to household and depends upon the size of land, family member strength of the household, engagement of the family members. There are number of families that are totally dependent upon the migrant labourers e.g. the family of Abdul Aziz Dar having 20 kanals of land and is totally dependent upon the hired labour migrants. The family is based on four sons, mother and Abzul Aziz himself. Abdul Aziz is government employee in Revenue Department, his two sons are pursuing MBBS degree, one son is pursuing engineering degree and his elder son is Assistant surgeon in the Department of Animal Husbandry. Families like this find very little time for agricultural activities and are cultivating their land on the hired labour arrangement. A recent trend in these families is that they lease their land to the neighbor or other interested household at a particular amount for a complete agricultural cycle. This agreement got extended after

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<sup>8</sup> The coming of outside migrants in the Bugam is 1985's process with the establishment of Brick Killen in village by resident of Yarikalan (village in the tehsil Chadoora) namely Mohd Ramzan Bhat. These laborers were engaged only in the killen. The migration of agricultural labour migrants is almost the phenomenon before the 2000. But there was limited and their presence was not visible in the village. the migration increased after the with the onset of year 2000, as the situation in Kashmir got little bit stable and the villagers in the Bugam shown much interest in the wage labourers.



the completion of the agriculture cycle with the mutual consensus between the two families. There are also families that are least dependent upon the hired migrant labourers. The main source of these families is the land and the family members themselves cultivate the land.

### 8. Relation of Migrant Labourers with the People of the village

These migrant labourers from the years had developed friendly relations with the villagers. They work side by side with the members of the farmer's family. They eat with them in the agricultural fields and also within the households and also reside within the village among the villagers. Farmers of the Bugam had kept the phone numbers of these migrant labourers and they used to call them when they are in their place of origin. They also called them to come when the agricultural cycle begin in the village. Many of the farmers in the village have visited to the families of the outside state labour migrants and have stayed there for some days. The relations between the farmers, vegetable dealers of the village and migrant laborers are relations of reciprocity and dependence in nature. Both the parties are depending upon each other and are functioning in consensus. There is no sign of exploitation and discrimination on the behalf of farmers or vegetable dealers to these labourers. These labourers are free to work anywhere and they came on their own and are enjoying working in the village. They live in the village without any fare and from last twelve years not single evidence had happened that lead to the physical conflict between the villagers and the labourers.

### 9. Emerging Trends in Labour Arrangements

The three major labour systems prevalent in the village are now family labour system, exchange labour system and hired labour system. However, the hired labour system is dominating the other two systems on each passing year. The recent trend in the labour arrangements is the emergence of production of land on sharecropping basis. This arrangement is mostly emerging in the families, whose members are engaged in non agricultural engagements and find very little time for cultivating their land themselves. So these families let their land for sharecropping to other family, the other family at times may be their relative or their neighbor. In the sharecropping they negotiate, how much the lending family will get out of the total agricultural produce. In case of paddy cultivation, the lending family of land directly gets the share out of the grains of paddy and in case of vegetables the lending family gets the share in terms of cash.

Another emerging trend in labour system in village is the emergence of "supervisory farming". In this the farmer plays just a supervisory role in the cultivation process and the whole agricultural activity is carried out with the help of hired labourers. In these types of families the members are engaged in non agricultural occupations and have higher incomes. Due to the scarcity of time and labour in these families they just cultivate land through this arrangement and most of the times they carry out the agricultural operations through the phone calls. They arrange labourers through the help of phones. They mostly hire the labourers on contract basis. These families due to higher incomes from agriculture and other non agricultural occupations, they also invest in the purchasing of land both in the village and outside of the village.

### 10. Impact of Labor Migration on the Village

The labor migration in the village has lead to the various changes in the village. The availability of these migrant labourers within the village makes agricultural processes intensive. The farmers can hire any time these labourers for the cultivation of the land. Thus the intensive use of land in terms of mixed and multiple cropping became possible and proved economically beneficial for the villagers. The education process in village fostered the labour migration by engaging the villagers towards the education process. So the children of the farmers that used to work on the fields are now spending their time in schools. The farmer has to search for the labor and that opened the door for the labor migration. On the other side, the availability of these migrant labourers proved supportive to the education of the students in the village. There are families who prefer to hire these labourers for the agricultural operations instead of their children who are studying. The table below indicates the relation between the education and labour migration. The process of labour migration started in the 2001 and it is evident from the table that the rate of education has very much increased from 2001 to 2011.

S. No	Census Year	Total population	Total Literate persons	Male Literacy	Female literacy	Percentage of literacy
1	1961	1037	55	48	17	5.30
2	1971	1197	143	132	11	11.94
3	1981	1763	241	220	21	13.66
4	2001	3025	1150	719	431	38.01
5	2001	3742	1951	1442	809	52.13

Table 1: Literacy in village Bugam

Source Primary Census Abstracts

The labour migration extended the agrarian relations of people of the village with the labourers of outside state and on every passing year these relations got increased and taking the position of permanent feature of the agrarian structure within the village. The labour migration also facilitated the sharing of skills in the cultivation of different crops. These labourers also added to the income of the people of the village by their labour especially to the income of the vegetable dealers. The labour migration also initiated the

construction of complexes, quarters within the village, in which they take shelter. The labourers in turn pay rent to the owners of these quarters. These labourers also increased the rate of purchasing of daily use articles from the local shopkeepers. One of the important changes of the labour migration within the village was the introduction of hired labour system by replacing the exchange labour system. Labor migration played a vital role in flourishing the vegetable cultivation in the village. There are more the 35 registered vegetable firms that buy the vegetables from the other villages in the district and then sell them in the local or Jammu and Delhi based markets. All these firms run with the help of these laborers.

The agriculture of the village is much dependent upon these migrant laborers and on each passing year this dependency gets increased. The youth of the village now are alienating themselves from the agriculture and are searching employment other than agriculture. But on the other hand their employment options are very limited within the state. However, they could use their land for generating employment options for them by establishing agri-based units other than wasting their time for the employment other than agriculture. Such a trend in near future may be concern for the villagers. In addition to the, labour migration also minimized the livelihood options of the poor and unskilled persons of the village.

### 11. Conclusion

The harnessing of land for the cultivation of various crops is not possible without the application of labour and this requirement is fulfilled by the people. In past when the land in the village was dominated by the paddy cultivation, the agricultural operations were mostly carried out on the basis of family labour system and exchange labour system. Joint family used to be the important feature of the village and used to play a key role in the cultivation process. Most of the agricultural operations were performed by family members themselves in order to meet their family needs. Thus family used to be the both unit of production and consumption. The members of one peasant household used to help the members of other peasant households during the peak season of the agriculture through the exchange labour system. The households of non peasant castes were also rendering their services to the peasant households. The relations among the households in the village were based on reciprocity and dependence. However, the labour pattern got changed with the change in crop pattern in the village. The family labour system and exchange labour system was overshadowed by the hired labour system. The most important factor in changing the labor pattern in village was the change from subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture. The other factors like education, labour migration, and commercialization of agriculture further increased the change in labour patterning in village agriculture. There are very few farmer households that do not depend on the hired labour system. The hired labor system has become the permanent feature of the village agriculture. The introduction of labour system in the village changed the nature of agrarian relations. Agrarian relations based on exchange of labour, mutual help got replaced with the money oriented relations. This change in labour pattern proved to be beneficial for the villagers like sharing of skills, supportive to the education of children, increasing income etc. simultaneously, it increased the dependence of farmers of village on the outside labourers and also minimized the livelihood options of the poor and unskilled persons of the village. Last but not least, these findings are significant within a particular geographical area in which the village under study lies and face certain limitations for whole of the Kashmir valley. This is a case study of one village of Kashmir and no definite generalizations could be made for whole of the region. The change in labour pattern in the village may not be same in other areas of the valley. So there is much need and scope for further investigation in the area to analyze the problem for a larger universe.

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