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Changing Face of Rural Kashmir: An Overview of Post 1947 Interventions

Audil Umar Lone

Research Scholar, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, India

Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to understand the role of modern education, science and technology and government policies, in the socio-economic transformation of Rural Kashmir after 1947. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir passed into the hands of Dogras since it came into existence on 15th of March 1846 as a result of 'Treaty of Amritsar' signed between Maharaja Gulab Singh and the representatives of the East India Company. Maharaja Gulab Singh and his heirs introduced colonial type of economy in the state. The regime declared property rights of peasants as null and void, took over the property rights of the whole land of the state and reduced the status of the subjects to only the tillers. The exorbitant taxation, corruption of officialdom and the negligence of agricultural sector led to agrarian crises that hit hard upon the inhabitants of the state.' It was only after the independence of the state from autocratic rule of Dogras in 1947, that steps were taken to ameliorate the conditions of the people. An attempt has been made to trace the impact of different government policies introduced after 1947 on the socio- economic facets of the state. The paper has relied upon both, primary and secondary.

Keywords: Change, Rural Kashmir, Transformation, Land Reforms, High Yielding Varieties, Rural Development etc.

Change is the law of nature. What is today shall be different from what it would be tomorrow. The socio-economic structure is subject to constant change. Individuals may strive for stability, societies may create the illusion of permanence, the quest for certainty may continue unabated, yet the fact remains that society is an ever changing phenomenon, growing, decaying, renewing and accommodating itself to changing conditions and suffering vast modifications in the course of time.ⁱ The word *change* denotes a difference in anything observed over some period of time. It is the change in the institutional and normative structure of society. [ii]

Change occurs in all societies. It is a universal phenomenon. No society remains completely static. This is true of all societies, primitive as well as civilized. Society exists in a universe of dynamic influences. The populations change, technologies expand ideologies and institutional structures and functions undergo reshaping. The speed and extent of change may differ from society to society. Some change rapidly, others slowly. Change may broadly be categorized as modifications or replacements. It may be modification of physical goods or social relationships. [iii] For example, the form of breakfast food has changed. Though we eat the same basic materials which we ate earlier, wheat, eggs, corn, but their form has changed. Ready-to-eat-cornflakes, breads, omlettes are substituted for the form in which these same materials were consumed in yester years. There may also be modifications of social relationships. [iv] The old, large authoritarian family has become the small equalitarian family. Our ideas about women's rights, religion, government and co-education stand modified. Change also takes the form of replacement. A new material or non material form supplants an old one. Horses have been replaced by automobiles. Similarly, old ideas have been replaced by new ideas. The germ theory of medicine has replaced older views of the cause of diseases. Democracy has replaced aristocracy.

In our society change results from the interaction of a number of factors. Generally, it is thought that a particular factor like change in technology, economic development or climatic conditions causes change. This is called monistic theory which seeks to interpret change in terms of one single factor. But monistic theory does not provide an adequate explanation of the complex phenomena of social and economic transformation. [v] As a matter of fact, socio-economic change is the consequence of a number of factors. A special factor may trigger a change but it is always associated with other factors that make the triggering possible. The reason is that the social phenomena are mutually interdependent. None stand out as isolated forces but bring about change of themselves. Rather each is an element in a system. Modification of one part influences the other parts and these influences the rest, until the whole is involved. There are many factors responsible for change. Among them modernization, industrialization, westernization, political regimes, social reform movements, religion, Science and Technology, education, media and various developmental programmes of the government have the prime importance.

Society in rural India has undergone a large amount of change since ages due to wars, socio-religious movements, modernization, industrialization, rural development programmes and more recent globalization and increased mechanization. Quiet similar to what has happened in other parts of Indian sub-continent, society of the state of Jammu and Kashmir also witnessed a large amount of change. For example, the society is changing from subsistence agriculture to modern mechanized agriculture, the institution of bonded labour is being replaced by the institution of free labour. Superstition of the village is getting substituted by reason, ignorance by education, traditional practices of living with increasing use of science and technology in day today life.

Rural society is an agrarian society and its growth depends upon the state of agriculture. If farming yields a fair amount of produce only, then the village communities will be prosperous and would find some leisure time to engage themselves in other activities. Prior to 1947 the agrarian system of Kashmir was feudal in character. The dominant feudal structure consisting of Jagirdars, Mukharidars and the Maufiadars exploited the cultivators for their selfish interests. ^[vi] Agriculture was entirely traditional in nature. Subsistence farming was in vogue and farmers were quite ignorant about scientific methods of cultivation. Since agriculture was the backbone of Kashmir economy, the Maharajas were supposed to pay due attention towards its development. But, contrary to it, we witnessed an agrarian crisis that hit hard upon the working classes in general and the peasantry in particular. The crisis was inevitable because of the policies of the state, like exorbitant taxation, ^[vii] corruption of officialdom ^[viii] and the negligence of agricultural sector. ^[ix] The worst thing was the oppressive taxation which had compelled the rural society to live from hand to mouth. The cultivator's right to food was almost negligible and the most of his production was taken away by the state and its collaborators and intermediaries. Frequent epidemics and famines that took place during this period made the lives of people miserable. People would often migrate to plains of Punjab for search of livelihood. Moving to the plains was fraught with dangers as some of them perished due to snow storms while crossing the high altitude mountains like Pir Panjal and Mari on foot. ^[x]

So at the time of independence in 1947, the developmental scenario of the state was characterized of economic stagnation and educational backwardness. Backwardness of the state was largely attributed to landlordism. The first popular government under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah introduced its development module on the socialist pattern as enshrined in the famous document of *Naya Kashmir Manifesto*. ^[xi] A visionary document that laid down a comprehensive plan for socio-economic, political, and cultural reconstruction of Jammu and Kashmir State. After coming to power the government passed historic legislation to bring about radical land reforms. It was in March 21, 1948 that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in his very first broadcast from Jammu announced historic Land Reforms, among such mention may be made of Abolition of Jagirdars, Resumption of Mukharies, Grant of Waste Lands, Moratorium upon non-commercial debts, Stay in Ejections, Association of Tehsils and district councils for the supervision of the execution of Government orders. Jagirdari system was done away with by passing first the cabinet order of 25th of May, 1948^{xii} and on 10th of March 1951.^{xiii} And as such all jagirs tenable during the pleasure of his highness held in perpetuity or any kind of compensatory jagirs were resumed.^{xiv} All *Muaffis* and *Mukharies* tenable during the pleasure of his Highness or held in perpetuity or held in lieu of some services were resumed. In this way 396 Jagirs and Maufis involving Rs, 5,56,313 and 2,347 Mukharies involving about Rs 177921 annually were liquidated.^{xv} This reform as such released 4250 acres of land in favour of cultivators.^{xvi} Absentee landlordism was abolished and actual tillers were granted ownership of the land. Thus an era of change in socio-economic and other spheres of life of rural Kashmir got initiated. This legislation and other legislations provided an immediate relief to tenants.

The enactment of Distress Debtors Relief Act S, 2006 (1949 AD) provided for conciliation Boards which could settle the debts. The amount of debts claims made before these debt conciliation Boards was Rs 175 lakh while the total debt in Kashmir only was 310 lakhs.^{xvii} Under Distressed Debt Relief Act, debts amounting to rupees 17,500,000 were reduced to rupees 85,00,000. Perhaps the debt could have been further sealed down, but all the debtors did not apply to the Conciliation Boards. Not only were the debts sealed down, but in order to grant relief to the debtors a summary procedure was provided for the restoration of their mortgaged properties by means of one more act viz, Jammu and Kashmir Reconstitution of Mortgaged Properties Act.^{xviii} As a result, an amount of 14.33 lakh mortgaged debts were liquidated.^{xix} These declarations orders, ordinances and acts were revolutionary in nature. Just with a strike of a pen century's old feudal order was liquidated and lakhs of rural debts cancelled. A contemporary writer concludes the impact of the said act in the following lines.

- 'The peasant son of the soil who had been ruthlessly exploited through Kashmir's long history had been freed from the shackles of feudal bondage. He was now a free man having in his propertiership the land which he and his ancestors had been cultivating for centuries for their masters. He was no more to serve others with his blood and sword. He was no more a foot soldier, a serf, a Begarr-Mazdoor, a rover or a tenant at will. He was a master unto himself. He had ultimately freed himself.'^{xx}

These reforms triggered an era of revolution in the socio-economic development of rural Kashmir. Subsequent measures were taken by the government to accelerate the pace of development. In 1963 Land Commission was set up to undertake a detailed examination of the existing land laws. After examining states agrarian system, the commission proposed certain basic changes in these laws to bring them in time with the broad objectives of increasing agricultural production and providing social justice. In order to bring the tiller into direct relationship with the state by abolition of all intermediary interests in land, the state government again came up with a bold legislation in July 1978 fixing a ceiling of 5.1 standard hectares on agricultural land holdings, excluding orchards.^{xxi} As a result 4000 acres of land were redistributed among landless poor. The reforms achieved the twin objectives of according the cultivators rightful place in the social order, and also ensure more efficient utilization of the state's resources. Although these measures resulted

in the fragmentation of holdings but it helped in increasing the productivity and production profile by conferment of ownership rights on the tillers.

These reforms were further supplemented by the programmes and schemes undertaken to bring more acres under crop production with emphasis on the use of High Yielding Varieties, adoption of latest techniques coupled with use of fertilizers and coverage of more and more land under irrigation facilities. The introduction of the programmes like High Yielding Varieties, Advanced Chemical Fertilizers, Intensive Agricultural Development Programmes, brought about a Green Revolution in the state. The area under High Yielding Varieties increased to 7 lakh hectares by 1989-90, 8.45 lakh hectares in 1993-94 and about 8.90 lakh hectares in 1996-97.^{xxii}

The quantity of fertilizers distributed in the state increased from 5.42 thousand tons in 1883-84. [^{xxiii}] The number of tractors required in the state in 1973-74 was 632 and the number increased to 2083 in 1983-84. The agricultural loans advanced by the agricultural credit societies increased from Rs. 2.91 lakhs in 1950-51 to Rs. 289 lakhs in 1968-69 and to Rs. 464.29 lakhs in 1980-81.^{xxiv} Besides, a cooperative movement was started to provide financial assistance to peasantry in the form of loans and to facilitate marketing in order to raise the standard of living in the country side. These measures became contributory factors for change in rural Kashmir

Strenuous efforts were made to increase the irrigated areas under various crops. The net area irrigated, which stood at 2.61 lakh hectares in 1950-51, increased to 3.07 lakh hectares in 1995-96. [^{xxv}] The establishment of Sher-I-Kashmir University of Agriculture Sciences and Technology in 1982 gave a fillip to the scientific knowledge of agriculture and adoption of new methods of agriculture. It provided the necessary education, research and technical-know how in agriculture and allied sectors to boost. The university has been able to evolve some seeds suited to geo- climatic conditions of valley. It released six new varieties of seeds yielding 8 to 10 percent higher produce.

As a result of all these factors – endowments in a situation where the peasant worked on his own land with full interest, the Net Domestic Product from the agricultural sector in the state including livestock increased from Rs.55.53 Cr in 1960-61 to Rs 226.54 Cr in 1975-76. The average yield per hectare of land has also increased. Yield of two major cereal crops paddy and wheat increased significantly. Yield of rice per acre increased from 9.50 quintals in 1950-51 to 22.59 quintals in 1964-65 and 27.04 quintals in 1983-84. Similarly yield of wheat per hectare increased from 4.50 quintals in 1950-51 to 19.07 quintals in 1994-95. [^{xxvi}]

As a result of all these efforts horticulture production increased manifold. The export of fresh fruits alone from the orchards increased from 0.998 million tons in 1971-72 to 3.822 million tons in 1980-81. The people of rural Kashmir who were once upon a time reduced to mere serfs were, now not only the master of their own holdings, but also provided with other modern facilities in social services sector, good education, better health and cultural advancement.^{xxvii}

However, the total transformation of rural Kashmir cannot be attributed to Land Reforms only. A steady income in other sectors of economy contributed significantly to the change. There was a very thin population of literate people till 1950's. People were mostly illiterate because there was little educational infrastructure available. Means of communication were very poor and there was very little road connectivity. Road transport, telegraph and telephone services were extremely poor. With poor means of communication people had little knowledge about other parts of the world. They had little exposure of the developmental activities going on around them. Although several initiatives towards the development of education had been taken right from the establishment of British Residency in Kashmir, however, it was only after the adoption of *Naya Kashmir Manifesto* by National Conference that the process got accelerated. It would not be out of place to mention that All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference adopted the progressive document viz *Naya Kashmir Manifesto* in 1944 which aimed at the socio-economic and political emancipation of the masses. In 1947 when the Nationalists came to power under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, *Naya Kashmir* document acted as beacon light for the government. The aim was to carry light of knowledge to the most remote and backward areas in order to remove ignorance and darkness. A number of steps were taken for development of free and compulsory primary education and access to higher, technical and adult education was made more easy. The number of primary schools increased from 1115 in 1950-51 to 5842 in 1975-76 while as the number of middle schools increased from 139 to 1885 during the same period and number of High schools including higher secondary increased from 55 to 723. Such an expansion in educational facilities provided tremendous opportunities to the children of peasant cultivators for education, especially when education was declared free after 1953. As a result, youth found new avenues of employment in service of the state.

At the time of independence, the health sector in Jammu and Kashmir was mostly traditional and backward in nature. There were only two major modern hospitals, one each in Srinagar and Jammu. Besides six District Hospitals there were 69 allopathic and 49 ayurvedic / unani dispensaries. The scenario however changed gradually as Government took various measures aiming at improving health care. Opening of new hospitals with adequate infrastructure and appointment of doctors and other paramedical staff witnessed a substantial growth. As number of health institutions increased from 124 in 1950-51 to 3679 in 1996-97 their bed strength increased from 250 to 10438 during the period. The period witnessed a growth in the number of doctors from 184 to 2757 and other medical personnel from 322 to 19945. Similarly, a Primary Health Center was established at the block level. The number of such centers increased from 33 in 1960-61 to 80 in 1975-76. The detailed facts and figures are given in following table.

Subsector	unit	1950-51	1960-61	1970-71	1980-81	1990-91	1996-97
Institutions	Nos	124	401	915	1816	3305	3679
Bed Strength	Nos	250	2929	4006	5422	7849	10438
Med. Persons in health Dept.	Nos	322	1612	3701	6002	11859	19945
Doctors	Nos	184	342	876	1715	2641	2757
Nurses	Nos	40	80	299	688	1666	1919
Cases treated	No lac	28.91	41.59	67.56	81.12	101.04	140.54

Table 1: Progress in Health Sector

Source: Digest of Statistics published by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics J&K Government. [xxviii]

Road communication plays a vital role in the economic development of a place, as key sectors of economy are greatly dependent on an efficient road communication system. The valley used to remain landlocked in winter for more than three months owing to heavy snowfall on mountains that surrounded it and due to absence of any motorable road connectivity. The first motorable road that connected the Valley with plains called Jhelum Valley Cart Road was constructed as late as 1890. [xxix] Another road that helped in breaking the isolation of the valley called Banihal Cart Road was constructed in 1922. [xxx] The construction of these roads no doubt laid a profound impact on the economy of Kashmir by making an enormous increase in the volume of trade and commerce. [xxxi] However it was only after 1947, that this sector registered a remarkable progress. Total road length of the state in 1950-51 was 3091 kilometers including 1215 Kms of unsurfaced roads. This road length increased to 13604 kilometers in March 1998. In 1950-51, only 405 villages were connected by roads while the number of such villages increased to 4261 by March 1998. [xxxii]

Government took further initiatives for upliftment of rural areas by building infrastructure and creating employment opportunities through a number of schemes. The rural development programmes like Community Development Programme (CDP) in 1952, Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (IADP) in 1961, Hill Area Development Programme (HADP) in 1962, Tribal Area Development Programme (TADP) in 1962, High Yielding Varieties of Seeds (HYV) in 1970-71, Command Area Development Programme (CADP) in 1974, Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) in 1970, Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Landless Development Agency (MFALDA) in 1970, Minimum Needs Programme (MNP) in 1974, Desert Development Programme (DDP) in 1977, National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) in 1980, Rural Landless Employment Programme (RLEP) in 1983, and Indra Awas Yojana (IAY) in 1986 contributed significantly in raising the standard of living in rural areas. The scheme of Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) was launched to develop technical and managerial skills in rural youth so as to enable them to take up self-employment in different sectors of state.

Conclusion

The Dogra rule laid a twin impact on the economy of Kashmir. It was for the first time in the annals of Kashmir that the State declared the property rights of peasants in land as null and void. It laid the introduction of a colonial type economy in the state. Lawrence had rightly pointed out that everything except air and drinking water was taxed. However, the positive aspect of Dogra rule was that during this period the valley came under the impact of modernization. Being a princely state, Jammu and Kashmir continued to remain backward in comparison to British India but after 1885 we witness a change in the governance which ultimately pushed the state towards modernization. The introduction of electricity, modern education, health services and communication during this period initiated the process of modernization in the history of Kashmir. However, it was only after 1947, Kashmir witnessed drastic socio-economic and political changes. The end of princely order followed by the establishment of popular government and subsequent abolition of landlordism, introduction of economic planning and greater emphasis on the educational development generated new forces which marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Kashmir. Increase in literacy, spread of primary, secondary, technical and adult education, skill development of youth, introduction of modern means of communication, mass media, press, radio and TV, business and industry, boost in agricultural production and availability of diversified occupational structure changed the course of life of a common Kashmiri. With increase in income, the standard of the living of the common man became better. Old power relations in the village broke down leaving place for the new power structure that emerged on the basis of merit and equal opportunity. Customs, beliefs and traditions began to be tested on the basis of reason and scientific validity. Traditional dress began to be replaced by modern one. Diets of more nutritious value began to be taken. Instead of mud and grass roofed houses with poor facilities of ventilation and sanitation people began to live in well ventilated, brick and cement houses that have adequate facilities of sanitation. With increase in income new means of amusement and recreation began to be used for example old story tellers during long winter nights in the light of an earthen oil lamp got replaced by multichannel dish and Cable networks. Costly games like Cricket, Badminton, Polo, etc. got introduced. With more jobs available in towns and cities, joint families gave way to nuclear families. Inter-caste marriages began to be solemnized and occupation and economic status of a man became more important than his caste and family status. Now man was free to plan for his better tomorrow. All these developments lead to an era of change in socio, economic, cultural, religious and other spheres of life in Kashmir.

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