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Agricultural Land-Use Declining in Kashmir Division

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ABSTRACT

Kashmir is losing its agriculture land due to low rates of return , limited irrigation facilities and the high price of land because of urbanisation. The agriculture land of Kashmir is shrinking at an alarming rate which is a major concern for future generations, according to a December 2016 state policy document on land-use. Anually Kashmir is losing an average of 1375 hectares of agricultural land due to rapid construction of commercial infrastructure, brick-kilns, residential colonies and shopping complexes, according to India spend analysis of government figures. According to the Department of Agriculture in Kashmir, within the past 16 years, the region has lost 22,000 hectares of agriculture land. The survey conducted by the department reveals that agriculture land decreased from 1,63,000 hectares in 1996 to 1,41,000 hectares in 2012 a loss of 22,000 hectares over 16 years according to state records. Agriculture is an important activity of the Himalayan region which plays a prominent role in the economy of the Kashmir valley as around 70 per cent of its population living in rural areas are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. The decreasing of agricultural land in the valley is a major cause of concern for future generations which needs a proper and urgent attention by the concerned authorities so that previous attire of agricultural lands comes again. The government is not taking any serious measures to preserve the agricultural lands here, due to which the concrete structures are coming up in-places that once used to be agricultural lands some years ago. The main discussion concludes by warning that the valley is facing a deficit in agricultural production and food grains are being imported from other regions of India which is increasing year after year which is the problem to look at.

Key Words : Land-use, Residential-colonies, Hectare, J&K Agrarian Act, J&K Land revenue act

INTRODUCTION

According to the state's 2016 economic survey, the local production of food grains has not kept pace with demand, and yields of principal crops like Rice, Maize, and Wheat have not grown over the years. Moreover, the scope of increasing net sown is very limited and landholding is shrinking due to continuous breakdown of the joint family system, growing urbanisation and population explosion. According to government reports the situation on the ground is getting worse day after day, the independent surveys have revealed that the net sown area in Kashmir at present is a mere 7 per cent, and the cultivable land in the state has shrunk to 30 per cent. The basic reason for the shrinking of the agricultural lands in the Kashmir valley is the "desperation of farmers", there is no market for most of the crops in Kashmir and the government isn't providing the irrigation facilities as it should to the farmers. In the present situation in the valley the easiest way to earn money for the farming community in Kashmir is to sell land or convert it into a concrete commercial structure. According to a recent survey conducted this year by the university of agricultural sciences, urbanisation and rapid construction on paddy fields has hit the region's agricultural sector hard. The contribution of agriculture to region's gross domestic product (GDP) has declined 11 per cent in 12 years. The survey reveals that during the fiscal year 2004-2005, agriculture contribution has dipped to a mere 17 per cent. The various surveys conducted by the different

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authorities, the conversion of agricultural lands into residential colonies and commercial complexes has resulted in a sharp decline in jobs. The workforce employed in the agriculture sector of Kashmir has declined from 85 per cent in 1961 to 28 per cent at present. The farmers are now seeing an easy way to earn money, they sell a hectare of land every year and live a life of comfort, why would we want to incur losses and gain nothing. Some farmers are still hoping that the sector can be revived someday, we need a proper market for agriculture and also we need to have a proper irrigation system in place, which at present is missing. If the state government with the help of international agencies would come forward and strategies, the sector would get a new life.

Objectives of the study:

(i) The decline in agricultural land-use in the Kashmir valley

(ii) The reasons behind the decline

(iii) Future impact of the said decline

(iv) Suggestions to the state government to look at the causes which are responsible for the decline of agricultural land-use in the Kashmir valley.

METHODOLOGY

The main theme of this study is to examine the declining agricultural land-use of Kashmir division which is the major concern for future generations as agriculture is the main economic activity of the valley. The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. For the primary data I went through some documents of the agriculture department personally and visited the department many times. For the secondary source of data I visited official websites of agricultural department of Jammu and Kashmir, went through some data published by Directorate of Economics and Statistics government of Jammu and Kashmir and also some articles published by some persons in the said field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main problem is that the agricultural land-use is declining day after day due to the unplanned emergence of residential colonies in paddy fields and also due to increase in population which leads to a continuous breakdown of the joint family system which makes it mandatory for nuclear family to construct a new house for his own family, to live away from the joint family which is most emerging trend in the valley. In my village 5-10 years back there was many 400-500 joint families living in our village, but in the present context there is seen not a single joint family. The Fig. 1 shows the construction of houses in the paddy fields which is one of the major concerns for the agriculture sector.

Fig. 1 : Construction of a house in the paddy field

The joint family is the valley is not seen in present era, the shrinking of agricultural lands is a major concern of future generations which will make the valley more dependent on the rest of country for food grains. The defecit is increasing year by year as the gap between production and requirement is increasing swiftly in the state. The data in the Table 1 depicts the production, population and requirement trends from 1950-51 as the

Table 1 : Food grain production in Jammu and Kashmir in relation to population growth production/requirement (quantity – 000 tonnes)

Year	Production	Population	Requirement	Deficit %
1950-51	206.30	1795304	307.00	32.00
1980-81	486.92	3269276	559.05	23.00
2011-12	826.72	7426575	1260.0	34.00
2013-14	957.92	7488918(P)	1271.05	24.63
2014-15	240.00	7638696(P)	1296.47	81.50

Source : Government of Jammu and Kashmir, agriculture department of Kashmir

deficit at the initial years was less without the coming of green revolution. By the advent of Green revolution in 1967-68 the deficit decreased but with the coming of new technological avenues with passing years the deficit increased very swiftly. The main reason for such an immense defecit is the decreasing of agricultural lands due to many reasons which we discussed above. The data of the Table 1 is as under.

According to the data of above table it is clear that deficit among the production of food crops and the population is showing enormous increase. In the year 1950-51 it was only 32% but in the recent year of 2014-15 it has shown a defecit of 81.50% which makes it clear that the gap between production and population is getting wider year after year and the defecit of 81.50% clearly indicates that production of crops either due to shrinking of agricultural lands or lack of agricultural technology but such a steep defecit of 81.50% is clearly an indication that the agricultural lands in the valley is on a steep decrease. The defecit is increasing at an enormous rate between the production and population and the production in the present context are far away from the requirements of the population which makes the state dependent on rest states for food grains. The decline in the growth rate and area under the food grain crops is attributed to lack of agricultural research, low productivity, less irrigational facilities and low replacement of seeds. The maximum agricultural area in the valley is rainfed, single cropping system, unorganised and inadequate marketing infrastructure, fragile soil in hilly areas susceptible to soil erosion and small size of holding. According to the latest estimates 97.9% of the holding falls in the size class of less than two hectares and around 90.69% in less than one hectare in the valley which is due to the breakdown of joint family system mainly and decrease of agricultural lands due to emergence of residential colonies. The number of agricultural holdings by size in the census of 2010-11 is shown in the table, the table gives us clear indication that the size of holdings has decreased from last 10 years with a rapid pace the main reason for this is that the joint families are breaking leading to the formation of nuclear families which leads to the division of agriculture lands and hence leads to the decrease in productivity and also the conversion of paddy fields into residential houses. The data in the Table 2 is showing decrease in size of holdings which is as under:

Table 2 : Number of holdings by size classes 2010-11 (Hectares)

Total Kashmir Division	No. of Holdings	Percentage
Below 0.5	581030	72.16
0.5- 1.0	149186	18.53
1.0 - 2.0	58033	7.21
2.0 - 3.0	11909	1.48
3.0 - 4.0	3232	0.40
4.0 - 5.0	916	0.11
5.0 – 7.5	596	0.07
7.5 – 10.0	175	0.02
10.0 – 20.0	89	0.01
20.0 – and above	56	0.01
All size classes	805222	100

Source : Financial commissioner revenue

Now I will through some light about the decreasing in agricultural land from last years due to the construction of residential colonies in paddy fields, growing urbanisation, population explosion and the continuous breakdown of the joint family system in the Kashmir valley. The data below depicts the decreasing agricultural land

It is clear from the Table 3 that the agricultural land under different crops has reduced greatly, also the production and the yield per hectare had influenced a decline which is major problem for the agricultural sector of the state which contributed maximum for the state

Table 3 : Details of area, production and yield

Sr. No.	Kind of crop	Area (000Hectares)		Production(000 qtls)		Yields (qtls/ha)	
		2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
1.	Rice	271.49	265.88	5567.38	4548	20.51	17.11
2.	Maize	298.68	308.62	5305.3	2735	17.76	8.86
3.	Wheat	392.07	290.99	6018.81	5819.5	20.16	20.00
4.	Barley	12.52	12.63	71.6	71.6	5.67	5.67
5.	Pulses	25.79	26.57	84.1	84.1	5.37	3.17
6.	Oil-Seeds	65.73	65.95	583.36	583.8	8.95	8.85
Total		1066.28	970.64	17630.55	13842	78.42	63.66

Source : Directorate of Economics and Statistics , government of Jammu and Kashmir

economy at times. This sector which is the main livelihood of the majority of the state people is facing immense decline which is dangerous for future generations as the deficit between the production and growing population is increasing makes the state dependent on the rest of states for various food-grains.

The two tables depicts the decreasing net sown area of agricultural lands in various districts from 2015-2017.

From the Table 4 and 5, it is also clear that the area sown under different crops is declining as mentioned annually from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 in the districts of Kashmir valley. The two major crops of the valley that is Rice and Maize has seen a decline in the total net sown area of overall districts of the valley. In the financial year 2015-2016 the total net sown area under Rice in all districts of the valley was 143655 hectares of land, it then reached to 135968 hectares of land in the financial year of 2016-2017 a decrease of 7687 hectares of area in one year is an alarming indication for the agriculture sector of the valley. The second major crop that is Maize, the net sown area of this crop is also decreasing in the districts of the valley as the figures of 2015-16 financial year are 83159 hectares as compared to 73942 hectares as in 2016-17 which means a decrease of 9217 hectares of area sown in one year tells us clearly that the agricultural lands are decreasing at fast rates in the valley. As far as other crops are concerned *viz*., barley, pulses and oil-seeds they are also decreasing in the area sown which is an alarming situation for the agricultural sector of the valley. Only one crop has shown some increase in the area sown

Table 4 : District-wise area sown under different crops 2015-16 (Area = hectares)

Sr. No.	District	Rice	Maize	Wheat	Barley	Pulses	Oil-Seeds
1.	Anantnag	23860	11090	-	-	338	13912
2.	Kulgam	12879	3604	-	-	285	7029
3.	Pulwama	12983	2913	341	-	234	8569
4.	Shopian	348	2208	-	-	16	126
5.	Srinagar	2905	97	-	-	317	219
6.	Ganderbal	7831	4012	-	22	-	2753
7.	Budgam	31803	13815	728	-	736	5564
8.	Baramulla	20540	20567	-	-	1390	235
9.	Bandipora	12726	6653	-	-	1789	1555
10.	Kupwara	17680	18200	-	-	-	-
11.	Leh	-	-	2632	154	263	84
12.	Kargil	-	-	1426	-	870	-
Total		143655	83159	4857	176	6238	40046

Source : Financial commissioner revenue

Table 5 : District-wise area sown under different crops 2016-17 (Area = hectares)

Sr. No.	District	Rice	Maize	Wheat	Barley	Pulses	Oil-Seeds
1.	Anantnag	23074	11140	-	-	336	13942
2.	Kulgam	12957	3603	-	-	348	6978
3.	Pulwama	14237	1761	350	-	220	9726
4.	Shopian	307	530	-	-	14	286
5.	Srinagar	2904	97	-	-	316	219
6.	Ganderbal	7832	4012	-	22	-	3646
7	Budgam	24567	7285	3134	-	592	3128
8.	Baramulla	20941	20148	-	-	1383	176
9.	Bandipora	11746	6625	-	-	1789	1545
10.	Kupwara	17403	18741	-	-	-	-
11.	Leh	-	-	2713	5	265	97
12.	Kargil	-	-	1565	-	675	-
Total		135968	73942	7762	27	5938	39743

Source : Financial commissioner revenue

viz., wheat, but this crop is concentrated only to Ladakh division and other two districts of the valley *viz.,* Pulwama and Budgam which makes it crop of only some regions of the valley.

It is clear from the above data that the agricultural land area and area sown under different crops is on a sharp decline. In a land-locked mountain Kashmir valley, the loss of agricultural lands has had a significant impact on the supply of food grains and their price stability. Kashmir valley is mostly dependent on the import of food grains from other states and the magnitude of dependence is increasing day by day, the 2013-14 economic survey of Jammu and Kashmir revealed. Due to the haphazard land conversion, the agriculture land has considerably shrunk in Kashmir valley as per door to door surveys conducted by the field workers of agriculture department. According to some experts of Sher-e-kashmir university of Agricultural sciences and Technology (SKUAST), the net area sown in Jammu and Kashmir is only 7% of its geographical area, according to the state's 2016 economic survey which is a clear indication about the decreasing net area sown in Jammu and Kashmir which is the result of growing population and construction of houses, buildings, residential colonies and industrial units in the agricultural lands.

Future impact of the said decline :

As we all know, In Kashmir division where 70% of the people are directly or indirectly related to agricultural activities for their livelihood. But if the agricultural lands get decreased day after day, ultimately the time will come when there would be no agricultural land in the valley and the entire population of the valley must be dependent on other states of the country for their food needs. This is the impact number one which is coming nearer and nearer to the valley people and we are seeing in the present context that lots of food-grains transported on trucks along national highway to the Kashmir valley. If the highway gets closed for weeks the valley faces food shortage and this is alarming situation the residents of the valley which needs urgent attention of the concerned authorities of the valley. The impact number two is that the people of the valley will be devoid of work and jobs which are related with the agriculture sector. This will have a huge impact on the economic stability of the Kashmir valley, which will lead to more poorer sections of the society. When the economy will become only market or business doing sections of the society will only emerge leaving behind maximum population which will day after day will become poorer and poorer. This will lead to the economic dis-stability of the valley. The future impacts of the declining agricultural lands in the valley are very dangerous for the economic stability which needs timely attention of the concerned authorities of the Kashmir valley. If the concerned authorities of the Kashmir valley along with the national or international collaboration with some reputed agencies and agricultural experts take timely, proper and productive steps which will influence the productivity, quality of crops and the marketing facilities along with good rates must be the responsibility of the state government. The day is no far when the industry will regain its own glory.

Future initiatives which the Government Authorities of the state must take in order to retain the agricultural lands :

In 2012, the Jammu and Kashmir high court passed directions against the misuse of agricultural land following a public interest litigation by a non-government organisation. The court directed all Deputy commissioners to ensure the Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian act and the Jammu and Kashmir Land revenue act are enforced to stop the conversion of agricultural land. Unfortunately, these laws have often been violated by the government itself.

The government authorities of the state must take serious measures regarding the decline of Agriculture land as it will enhance future burdens on state economy. The only way to deal with this major problem is that the government and the high-court of the state must implement these acts as a necessary note to every individual and it must be implemented in real terms through-out the state and the voilaters of these acts must be dealt with heavy fine and also a term of life imprisonment must be awarded to the voilaters. The government authorities must bring awareness camps yearly about the importance of agricultural lands in the valley as the valley is devoid of industrial sector due to many reasons. The government must take initiatives to bring back the agricultural lands into the agricultural sector and also convert the barren or lands which have water shortage into the agricultural sector by providing them with the required facilities through time, in order to bring back old glory of the agricultural sector.

Irrigational facility is another concern which the government authorities might look at, maximum

percentage of the lands in the valley is not having proper irrigational facilities which also leads to the conversion of agricultural lands into residential colonies or structure of some other importance which is a major setback to the agricultural sector. The authorities might look at this major problem to curb the conversion of agricultural lands and make them available for future generations.

Concluding remarks:

Looking at the present situation in Jammu and Kashmir the figures in terms of area sown and production are declining at rapid pace, and the gap between production and population is increasing at an alarming rate and the defecit has reached to 81.50% in the year 2014-15 which is a major concern to the agriculture department of the valley which needs huge concentration of the authorities of the valley in order to protect the basis of the sector. Even though green revolution in 1967-68 has led to bumper harvest of major crops especially Rice and Wheat of the valley, which helped upto a large extent in uplifting the rural population and also 70% of people which are directly or in-directly dependent upon this sector for their livelihood. The agricultural sector is the backbone of the economy of the Kashmir division so the authorities might take serious steps to bring back the glory of the said sector but unluckly the authorities had not taken any serious steps yet that is the reason why the said sector has seen such a decline. The late figures are very disturbing and the trends have started emerging in the said sector as the farmers are losing interest in the said sector. To sustain continuous growth in productivity in agriculture, profitability and sustainability is must. There is a need to create a general awareness about the knowledge, skill, techniques and acts to enhance production, productivity, quality of food grains and the decrease in agricultural lands so that the farmers could earn a sustainable income for survival.

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