



## IRRIGATION WORKS AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF KASHMIR DURING AVANTIVARMAN'S REIGN (855-883 A.D)

Aejaz Ahmad Kuchy, Department of history Jiwaji University Gwalior (M.P)

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**Abstract:** *With the fertile soil and abundance water supply Kashmir has been from the earliest times depending mainly on agriculture as the principle food and wealth. Due to political stability and favorable peace conditions, law and order during the reign of Avantivarman, economic prosperity of both the people and the state improved considerably. Extensive drainage and irrigation schemes contributed a lot in this direction. The irrigation minister (suyya) helped him in all these activities.*

**Keywords:** *Dhanya, Yava, Vitasta, Sali, Anu, Chana, Mouser*

### INTRODUCTION

During ancient period agriculture was the main occupation of the people. Among the agricultural products Dhanya (Paddy) seems to have been cultivated extensively from an early period as it was the staple crop. Dhanya (Paddy) of different varieties like Sali & Anu has been frequently mentioned in Nilmatapurana as a major food of the people which was also offered in worship to gods. It is also quite clear from the pages of Rajatarangini that Dhanya (Paddy) was the chief crop of the valley, the scarcity of which often resulted in disastrous famines. According to Venetian traveler Marco Polo (Visited 13<sup>th</sup> Century A.D) said that rice was the principle food of the people of Kashmir. The seeds of rice were sown in the month of charita (March) & by the month of Bhadra (September) the fields were covered with ripened Paddy. The fields have been properly ploughed up before sowing seeds and oxen were employed for tillage. Harvesting was done in the month of Asvina (October) after which the new crops (Navana) were performed. The other crops cultivated were Yava (Barley) and pulses. The Yava (Barley) according to the evidence furnished by the Nilmatapurana ripened at the month of Jyesta (June). According to Stein, Yava (Barley) was eaten in Kashmir only by the poorest or in places where proper food could not be prepared. But Nilmatapurana mentions it as food grain which had a sacred status. The Pulses consisted of several types such as gram (chana), lentil (mouser) and black gram (Mung). In addition to these crops, fruits of various varieties were also produced. Among the fruits, the pear (li), the wild plum (nai), the peach (Lau), the apricot (hang or mui) and the grapes (po-tua) were



chief fruits noticed by Hieun Tsang. Apples (Palevata) were also cultivated. The cultivation of saffron has been a monopoly of Kashmir from earliest times.

However, the beautiful valley was regularly hit by disastrous floods damaging Dhanya (Paddy) and other crops so much, so that the cost of crops rose very high and it becomes impossible for poorest people to get both ends of meal in these circumstances. In order to enhance the production and save the country from recurring floods an effort in this direction was made by Lalitaditya. He had tried to drain the valley through the suitable directions. He also arranged for conducting the waters of Vitasta at chakradhara and distributed it to various villages. The drain operations of Lalitaditya made the country productive to a great extent. But the work of irrigation started by him was neglected by these successors resulting disastrous floods once again.

Another great attempt in this direction was made by Avantivarman (885-883 A.D) with the help of Suyya, the irrigation minister to regulate the waters of the Vitasta and to drain the whole valley. It is this reason which made Avantivarman the most lovable. There is no grater name in the whole history of Kashmir than Avantivarman. His reign is famous for bringing agricultural revolution to the valley of Kashmir. The arable land available till then and the produce were not enough to fulfill the needs of the people. Further problems were added by frequent flood. After the death of Lalitaditya once again floods had started ravaging the valley at that time was saved by Avantivarman with the help of an able and gifted Suyya. Before becoming irrigation minister, Suyya always used to say to his friends colleagues that he knew how to save valley from recurring floods, but what could he do without means. Soon his utterances and dedications reached the ears of king Avantivarman and the later summoned him to his personal presence. On hearing the news Suyya at once presented himself before Avantivarman. On seeing his confidence Avantivarman made him his irrigation minister and placed at his disposal all the resources of the state.

The swift mind of Suyya has rightly, perceived that the valley was flooded because the waters of the Vitasta (Jhelum) could not flow with ease through the narrow passage, about three miles below Baramullah (ancient Varamullah). This passage had been continually falling into it from the hill side. The problem was therefore, only of clearing & widening the river passage. But in itself, it was nothing short of a difficult task. Surprisingly, however, Suyya used a very simple method to achieve the desired goal. He took a lot of money from



the Govt. Treasury & proceeded in a boat towards his destination. Reaching the village of Yaksadara (Near Khad-anyar, below Baramullah), he threw some (handful) money into the river & moved away from the scene quickly. Some people thought he had gone mad & were therefore watching his methods with a strange curiosity. But here was an opportunity for them to get money. Therefore at once jumped many into the river, searched for the money while doing so dragged out of the river rocks & boulders too. For two or three days Suyya repeated his so called foolish process & the people made their fortune, cleaning the river of all the bulky & weighty material. This notable engineer then blocked the whole river by the construction of a dam of stones at a suitable site & got the silt also removed from the river bed. No wonder, the river was sufficiently deepened. Embankments were simultaneously raised on either side of it in order to check the rocks from falling into it in future also. These operations took another seven days & the dam was there after destroyed. Lastly, new beds were constructed for the river at such places where floods used to cause breaches, so well & so successfully were all these measures carried out that the streams flowing to the ocean, set on its course in haste as if eagerly longing for the sea after its detention.

Formerly, it was near Trigam in the Larpargana that the Vitasta (Jhelum) & Sindh rivers met & turned a large area into a Swamp. But Suyya changed their junction to the present place near Srinagar & made their combined waters flow through the Walur Lake. Along the new course stone embankments were constructed for a length of seven Yojanes (about 42miles). In a similar way the course of many tributaries also were regulated, with the result that thousands of acres of arable land were reclaimed and on their site sprang up a number of populous and prosperous villages. These Villages were protected by the construction of circular dykes which gave them the appearance of round bowls of Kunda & therefore the name of Kundala.

In order to make the irrigation system of the valley more effective, a network of canals were constructed & irrigation facilities were provided to those areas which were dependent on rain. The Nur canal about 13Km long takes its water from river Vitasta (Jehlum) at Shadipur & then flows into the Wular Lake irrigated Anderkot Village. It is the model of the canal that was constructed by Suyya during Avantivarman's reign. The Nandikul Canal takes its water from the Nullah Anantnag at Lassipur. It is 30 Km long & irrigates 8000 acres of land in the northern area of Anantnag. After providing irrigation facilities to each & every village lands,



Suyya took the samples from each village & noticed the time taken by each sample to dry up. By this method he got an idea of the time for which irrigation was required by each village land and accordingly arranged the supply of water to it. After taking these wonderful measure, the valley was not only saved from food famines but the production increased to such an extent that according to Kalhana the price of Dhanya(Rice) came down to 36 dinner per Kharwar, the Lowest Prince the Valley had ever witnessed. Prior to Avantivarman the normal price used to be 200 dinners per Kharwar leaving aside 1500 dinnars per Kharwar during the time of famines. So Kalhana calls Suyya (Anapati) lord of food. The all hard work was done by Suyya but the credit goes to Avantivarman who provided all facilities to his irrigation minister & never ever such type of facilities were provided by any king to his able ministers.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data in the forgoing pages provides much information about the economic prosperity of the valley during the reign of Avantivarman. He ruled only for a short period of about 28 years but during his reign extensive drainage & irrigation works were under taken & the valley was freed from the danger of floods. A low caste Hindu, Suyya by name assisted him in all these beneficent works. It is this reason which makes him the most lovable. There is no greater name in history of Kashmir then Avantivarman. His reign is famous for bringing agricultural Revelation to the valley of Kashmir.

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