



“Avantivarman: Development of Irrigation and Agriculture during Avantivarman’s Rule in Kashmir”

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Introduction

Avantivarman (853-888 A.D.) belonged to Utpala dynasty emerged as a powerful King. He was most sagacious king. He built temples at Avantipur after his name. His Minister Suyya was a great genius. His court had a pride on two poets-Ranakar and Ananvardhana. During his time price of paddy showed a deep decline from 36 to 20 dinars. Suyya who was a great engineer is said to have drained a large chunk of wasteland during his regime. His memory is commemorated by Suyyapur or Sopore, a township in Baramulla district. It is said that when this great engineer was working in Sopore no people were coming forth to plunge themselves in gushing water. The king thereupon ordered that a part of treasury may be thrown into the water, a large number of people plunged into the river to get as many coins as they could. The skill of Suyya worked and the river was cleared of silt. Sopore town in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir was founded by the famous Utpala engineer and irrigation minister Suyya during the peaceful reign of king Avantivarman in 880 CE.

Rajatarangini tells us that in the Karkota family, Lalitapida had a concubine named Jayadevi, the daughter of Kalpapala an inhabitant of Akhuva (IV.678). Her son was Chippatajayapida. The young Chippatajayapida was advised by his maternal uncle Utpalaka or Utpala (IV.679). Eventually the Karkota dynasty ended and a grandson of Utpala became king. When Sukhavarmā was on the point of becoming king, he was murdered by his envious friend Shushka. Shura the minister, then thought Avantivarman son of Sukhavarmma, to be fit for the throne ; and in order to prevent disturbances among the people, he in the Kashmir era '31+ deposed the reigning king Utpalapua, and raised Avantivarman, to the throne.

Rajatarangini writes that [p.106]: Avantivarman cleared the kingdom of all enemies, and by his good behaviour pleased the good. The minister obeyed the orders of the king, and the king complied with the requests of the minister. The king was forgiving and grateful, the minister devoted to his master, and without vanity. Such a union is rare. The wise king, although he had obtained a kingdom, did not forget his past condition and used to meditate in the following



manner : — " The regal dignity inspires ambition in great minds, and leads men to crime. There is none who is favored with royal dignity but feels misery in the end. How can she (Fortune) who rose from the ocean along with the courtesans of heaven, learn to be faithful to one. She has no affection, and has followed no king to the other world though long solicited. The stores of golden drinking vessels of departed kings no longer belong to them ! Why do not kings feel ashamed to eat from plates from which others have eaten before them? "Who does not fear to look on the huge plates of silver marked with the names of departed kings? Who can feel pleasure at the sight of those unholy necklaces which have been taken out from the necks of dying kings? And who does not feel terrified to touch these ornaments left by them with their regrets and lamentations at the time of their death. [p.107]: Wealth is purified when bestowed on proper persons." Thus thinking, the king broke the golden ornaments and things, and gave them to Brahmanas. One Brahmana instead of saying, "admirable ! king," when he received the gift, addressed him by name and said " admirable ! Avanti ! "The king was so pleased at this that he bestowed much wealth on him. The king gave away everything in charity retaining only his *Chamara* and umbrella, and thus he spent the accumulated wealth of his predecessors.

Development of Agriculture and Irrigation under Avantivarman

Kashmir is an extensive alluvial vale bounded on the west by Suliman Mountains, on the east, south-east by the River Sutlaj and on the north by the Himalayas. Whosoever is looking at the map of vast Himalayan region is sure to find many delightful valleys and picturesque spots. But among all these Kashmir is unique in her flora and fauna, history, culture and art. Blessed by nature with fertile soil, temperate climate, water resources and consequently easy cultivation Kashmir has been known as "a paradise for agriculturists". Kalhana in *Rajtarangini* mentioned that in the valley majority of population lived in villages that were deeply tied to agriculture.

Owing to the isolated nature of the valley as land locked by high mountains, the agriculture was organized on the basis of self- sufficiency of villages. The communication of the valley with other parts of the country to purchase a few necessities of life like salt and iron was limited. The cultivators raised crops of food grains particularly of rice, barely, pulses, fruits and saffron. The crops were produced by using simple tools which included wooden plough and sickle as referred



in NilmatPurana and Rajtarangini. The plough was driven with the help of oxen. Besides oxen the villagers reared cows, sheep and goat which provided them milk and wool. Further Kashmir has been known for fruits since early times. The town of Narpur and Jayavana (Zewan) has been mentioned by Kalhana of possessing beautiful gardens. Hieun Tsang had noticed, pear, plum, peach, apricot and grapes. Alberuni mentioned in Tahqiq-i-Hind that a basket of flowers was sent to somnath temple daily from Kashmir for worship.

Agriculture on plain land needed systematic irrigation and fertilization. The valley being fortunate, possessing water resources in abundance, functioned a key to its economic progress. However there were certain areas where water scarcity was felt in the period. King Suvarna in the pre-Ashokan Age constructed a canal called Suvarnamani (modern Sunmun kul), it irrigated a part of the Advin Pargana situated on the alluvial pleateau to the south of Ramyar river in the District Kulgam. Lalitaditya (724-61) AD of the Karkota dynasty is noted in the history of Kashmir for introduction of new methods of irrigation i.e. construction of water wheels (counter lift) as utilized by the Indus people also. Due to this method he brought more land under cultivation especially the plateau of Tsakdar (Cakradhara) near vijbror (Bejbhara).

But under the rule of their successors the situation worsened. It goes to the credit of Avantivermen (855-883) AD, who took a series of reforms which healed the wounds of the suffering people. The ruler utilized the services of his able minister Suyya who has been titled Anapati (Lord of food). M.A.Stien summarized the methods as introduced by Suyya to achieve the desired goal. It was a herculean task of dredging and widening. He constructed high embankments on the both sides of the river in order to check the rocks and boulders from falling into the river. These steps accelerated the flow of water and thereby checked the threat of inundation. Further he changed the junction of the Vitasta (Jhelum) river and its tributary the Sindh River from Trigam in the Lar Pargan (District Gandarbal) to Srinagar and regulated the course of water of the river in such a way that it flowed right through the Mahapadma Lake which passed through embankments constructed by the government. He also regulated the water of other rivers and reclaimed thousands of acres of land for agriculture. In addition to these he had taken samples of soil from each village and noticed the time taken by each sample to dry up. Accordingly he distributed the water for irrigation to each village. The culminative effect of these steps increased the agricultural production in Kashmir and



thereby brought economic prosperity to the people. Kalhana in Rajatarangini mentioned that a kharwar (80kg) of rice was sold for 36 dinars (coins) during the period while in normal times during his predecessors was sold at 200 dinars (coins) and in abnormal times 1050 dinars (coins). These steps immortalized Avantivarman by the name of Engineer King. But under the succeeding dynasties the glory lost its legs especially under Lohara dynasty from 1003 AD onwards, which showed the signs of decline. Most of its rulers were cruel, selfish and sensual. They brought nothing but miseries to the people of the valley.

Conclusion

It is evident that due to scant sources of the pre-historic period, it is difficult to frame a solid opinion about the concept. However on the basis of available sources regarding the proto-historic period it is clear that Kashmir has risen to a pitch of glory and under Avantivarman it witnessed the period of marked consolidation. He ruled only for a short period of about 28 years but during his reign extensive drainage and irrigation works were undertaken and the valley was freed from the danger of floods. His irrigation minister and the engineering marvel Suyya by name assisted the king in all these beneficent works. It is this reason which makes Avantivarman the most lovable.

References

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