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Evolution of Agricultural Practices in Ancient India

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Abstract:

India which is an agricultural country and 80 percent of its people are headed by agriculture. Evolution took place and man began to stay in one place instead of moving around. Due to the special geographical conditions of India and its natural resources, it has been a center of attraction for foreigners since ancient times. The birth of a world-famous civilization like 'The Indus valley' took place here. The arrival of Arya, Alexander, Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Mughals, and Europeans came to India at different times some of them looted and returned and some settled here. Through this paper I have tried to shed light on the development and growth of agriculture in Indian subcontinent since very ancient past.

Keywords: Perti, Sita, Prana, Birshit, Rabi, Kharif, Jinas-e-Kamil, Mukadam

Introduction:

Man first settled in the parts of the world that were suitable for agriculture, that is; places where the soil was fertile, the water was plentiful, the climate was equally warm, the land was level and such places suitable for agriculture were such as valleys of Nile river, Euphrates river, Tigris river, Indus river, Ganga river, Yangtze river etc. Therefore, the first development of human civilization first took place in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China. The discovery of agriculture accelerated the development of human beings and the development of civilization. Traces of agricultural research date back to the Stone Age. This age is believed to have started 15,000 years ago and lasted till the Metal Age. Mankind of this age had gone far beyond its great ancestors. In search of food, the great ancestors of man had to go through many stages such as hunting stage, pastoral stage and then agricultural stage and the discovery of agricultural methods in this age was the greatest gift of man to his society. Before the discovery of agriculture, man had to lead a nomadic and miserable life. The discovery of agriculture put an end to this homeless life (singh, 1968).

10 thousand to 6 thousand B.C.E. Learning to grow food, raise animals, make utensils, weave cloth and replace the Old Stone Age tools with new polished stone and later iron tools has brought about a great change in human life.(Majumdar, Raychoudary, & Dutt, 2013). It was in this age that man got involved in agricultural practise and "it laid the foundation of the first human civilization". Now with the advent of agriculture came stability in the life of the human being and the human being started living in one place in groups to take care of agriculture.(Jha, 1877).With the advent of agriculture, the practice of producing more crops and cultivating more land to feed the growing population emerged. Thus many families began to live together and collectively protect themselves and their farms from their enemies. Thus began the



development of human civilization. In the Indian subcontinent, traces of Neolithic man were found mostly in the north-western region and in the south.(Sharma, 2018) Early traces of traditional culture have been found in the Indian subcontinent in the form of small farming villages in central and southern Baluchistan and Sindh. The oldest of these remains is 3500 B.C.E. are of 3000 B.C.E. a similar mixed civilization arose near Amri in south-eastern Baluchistan (100 miles south of Mahonjodoro and one mile from the left bank of the Indus). This civilization developed into a major system and after going through several stages came to be known as the Harappan civilization in Montgomery (West Punjab)(Jha, 1877).

Evolution of Agricultural Practices

The agricultural stage is believed to have started around 6000 B.C.E. The earliest evidence of agriculture in India comes from Mehrgarh. The sudden fall and emergence of some grains of wheat, rice, barley etc. grown in the forest in the field is believed to have given rise to agriculture. For a long time man was eating grass seeds and tuber roots.(Randhawa, 1980) The best seeds to eat were wheat and rice plants, wheat plants were abundant in the Middle East and rice plants were abundant in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China. By sowing these seeds on fertile land, man discovered that they could provide food from a single source. These crops had to be cared for the future. So the human being gave up his nomadic life and now the human being had settled down in one place as a farmer.(singh, 1968)

The excavations of the Harappan civilization or the Indus Valley Civilization give us very important information about the agriculture of that time. Wheat and barley were the two main crops of that time. The Harappans were of two kinds of wheat seeds, knotted and bony varieties of Indian wheat. The people of both Harappa and Mahonjodaro were having barley seed with small grains of six stripes. Excavations have yielded samples of wheat and barley in that period (Sharma, 2018).

Arya which was a rural civilization, their main occupation was agriculture and animal husbandry (Majumdar, Raychoudary, & Dutt, 2013). They knew about iron. They cleared the forests on a large scale and started cultivating the land with an iron plow. According to Parnani, "the fields were ploughed two or three times and they were classified according to the yield"(Sharma, 2018). The ancient men also knew the weather and its impact and contribution on productivity. This helped them in farming. From the post-Vedic period there is a description of sowing, harvesting and fertilizers or medicine (Jha, 1877). The Rig Veda gives a lot of information about the origin of land. The Shatapatha Brahman Granth also provides information on ploughing and farming rituals. The fields were ploughed with six, eight, twelve, and fourteen



oxen (Kapoor, 1998).Wheat, barley, rice, and a variety of oilseeds were used. With the use of farm implements, more crops began to be produced. With the increase in foodgrains, trade increased and new towns and markets came into being and urban life began (Sharma, 2018).

In order to reduce the population in the populated areas during the Hole Age and to make the swampy and barren lands arable, for the first time weak and poor people were settled in these settlements as farmers and by giving them greed, tax exemption, animals, Agricultural seeds, water for irrigation etc. were provided and settled there(RomilaThapar, 2012). The economist have found that the irrigation system was good. There are two types of land described: Parti (low rank) Sahi or Sita (good rank) land(Jha, 1877).There is information about "sacrifice" and "tax" which was probably a part of the tax on orchards, flowers and fruits. Kotlia writes that in times of crisis a tax "Prana" meaning "gift" was taken."Birshit" meaning "forced" was taken from the farmers.(Jha, 1877). On large scale, land donations were made during the Gupta period but this practice had been going on since the time of Satvahana. Due to large scale land donations exercise, the feudal system was introduced in India. Though, the feudal system was already prevalent in South India, which is known from the Pallava inscriptions of the third century (Sharma, 2018).

In India, land has been owned by the people or the artisans from the very beginning. The victorious ruler had the right to collect land tax from the people. The farmer had to pay taxes to the government for the services he needed for his security and livelihood and for what he received from the government. Due to the occupation of India by the Turks, however, the Hindu monarchy came to an end. But under the prevailing conditions, the farming continued. Turks who were mainly soldiers, did not make any significant changes in the land system (Singh, 2003). People were free to buy and sell land. In 600 to 1200 C.E., during this time many changes were seen in agricultural technology. For example there was the construction of dams for irrigation, irrigation with the help of animals from wells, use of hand machinery for extraction of oil etc.(Singh I. H., 2012). Sultan Sher-Shah Suri made many important reforms in the field of agriculture. He was the first to make the measurement of land and because no other technology was existing, for this 32 finger yards were used to measure the land and various systems of land tax collection were introduced and well managed irrigation which lasted till the time of all Mughal government and British (Arora, 2019).Twice a year the crop was harvested, once in Rabi and once in Kharif. There were some crops whose yield could not be accurately estimated were fixed and the government took its share in cash on such crops. These crops were called Jinas-e-Kamil or Jinas-e-Ala meaning high quality crops in Mughal times.(Singh D. B., 2003).Cotton and sugarcane were the main categories in this category. The flax crop was used to cut ropes.



Mustard and sesame oil were widely used. Cultivation of many new crops like indigo, tobacco, and potato, red chilli etc. was started (Chandra, 2016). At that time bone and fish manure were being used more in the fields. Fish manure was very useful for sugarcane production. The villagers lived a self-reliant life. There were also many famines in India during the middle Ages. During the famine, the government helped the people. In the middle Ages, though peasants and agriculture were always in the spotlight of the Delhi kings, the situation was pitiable. Because government officials sometimes carried out large-scale looting and sometimes collected land tax at a higher rate than the government orders (Pandey, 2012).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have tried to shed light on the history of Indian agriculture and the changes that have taken place in the field of agriculture as well as in human life with the passage of time. How the discovery of agriculture brought stability in the life of a human being and instead of moving from place to place, he settled down at one place and with that human civilization and culture began to develop. Then family life, tribes, villages and cities came into existence. In the beginning man started farming to fill his own need then slowly started to feed the family, and the growing population. Thus with agriculture came many other occupations. With the rise of agriculture came domestic and foreign trade and we began to interact with other countries and their cultures. Thus, although agriculture is an important part of our lives, from time to time governments have not paid due attention to it. At different times, the main objective of the governments was to make maximum profit from agriculture and the farmers and peasants were ignored. Due to which the farmers had to revolt against the governments for their rights and in the history there are many examples of peasant's movement that had occurred in different periods.



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