



## Changing Patterns of Sharecropping in Rural Kashmir

### KEYWORDS

Sharecropping, Tenants, Land-lease, Irrigated Land and Un-irrigated land.

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**ABSTRACT** *The present paper highlights the patterns of sharecropping in agrarian system of rural Kashmir with special reference to a village situated in south-western direction of valley. By focusing on factors related to leasing arrangements which have their own impact on both land owners and tenants during the process of agrarian transformations. The paper provides a detailed account of sharecropping patterns ranging from crop cultivation to harvesting operations by highlighting the significance of time in the process of leasing arrangements in the village.*

### INTRODUCTION

Sharecropping is a commonly observed land tenure contract where a tenant cultivates the land for the landlord and the output that is produced is shared on some pre-determined basis. The output share ranges variously from 25% to 50% for the landlord (Chaudhuri and Maitra 2006 and Bhaumik 1993). Sharecropping has long been the subject of much controversy because it is considered to be an inefficient form of cultivation (Marquis de Mirabeau, as quoted in Basu, 1984).

One common conjecture is that sharecropping allows the landlord and the tenant to share the production risk. This is especially true in third world countries where agriculture is still dependent to a large extent on the vagaries of nature. It was believed that over time, with increasing modernization of agriculture and the introduction of new technologies and the simultaneous reduction in the inherent risk through such means as crop insurance and greater availability of credit, sharecropping will become obsolete. However sharecropping continues to thrive as a prominent form of tenancy contract not only in third world countries but in developed nations as well (Allen and Lueck 1992).

The success of the landowner-tenant relationship depends on the level of trust that can be established between them. And a proper agreement can lay the groundwork for such a trust – through flexibility for the landowner and security for the tenant (T. J. Byres 1983). The system of sharecropping is a traditional practice that was prevalent before the agrarian reforms under various leaderships in the agrarian system of Kashmir. Before the establishment of Mir Shah Dynasty the condition of peasants was miserable they were subjected for the system of beggar or Corvee (Irfan 1999). Under the Mir Shah's the people were forcibly employed to separate the saffron from petals and stamens and for this they were given certain quantity of salt as their wages, but from the time of Ghazi Shah Chak the condition of peasants had changed and they collected eleven Taraks out of which one Tarak was to be there wages (Hassan 1959).

Under the influence of development of sultanate in Kashmir the peasants and tenants were living in miserable condition. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir 31 percent of the total operated area was under lease in cultivation before 1976 agrarian reform and it was mainly cultivated by small and marginal farmers who cultivate the bulk of the total leased in area in the state. After the introduction of land reforms in valley of Kashmir the peasants have got the rights over land which they were cultivating from the jagirdars and big landlords (Aslam 1977).

After 1980's horticultural sector has extended in the valley of Kashmir especially in districts like Anantnag, Pulwama and Baramullah (Verma 1994). Peasants of the valley have started transforming their land from crop to fruit cultivation by transplanting

orchards of apple and pears (Statics Jammua and Kashmir 1999-2000). Earlier peasants were cultivating traditional crop like paddy, wheat, pulses and lentils were not able to cultivate market oriented produce. Now they have started cultivating fruits like apple and pears and are confident to get a good yield.

After transplanting orchards of apple it takes at least 5-6 years to grow up and get yield. In this process peasants in valley of Kashmir lease-out their newly transplanted land to land less people and small peasants for cultivation of various cash crops like mustard, pulses and vegetables including chilies. This process of leasing-out of land leads to coming up of a class of sharecroppers that work on the leased in land throughout year.

### PATTERNS OF SHARECROPPING IN THE VILLAGE

The subject of land ownership is intrinsically a complex issue, being one of the prominent forces of production; land attracted the attention of human beings from the very inception of human civilization. Their constant attachments with land not only earned them numerous rights and privileges but also an important position which came to be duly recognized and guaranteed by law at different times in human history (FAO 2004). Land ownership means excess and control over land and also on the means of production, after the introduction of 1978 land reform in Jammu and Kashmir State land was redistributed and every family had got the ownership and access on land to survive. It is unfortunate that even after the reform period inequality in land ownership still exists.

After the introduction of land reforms in the State big land holdings was abolished under Big Landed Estates Abolition Act of 1950 (Hassan 1973 and Aslam 1977), that is why most of the families in the village are coming under the category of medium holding size.

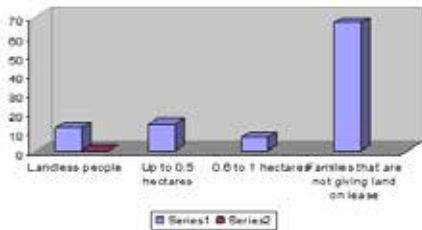
Historically sharecropping has remained as an important component of production and ratio's of sharing produce has been changing from time to time. In 1978 with the introduction of land reforms in state of Jammu and Kashmir tenants had got rid from the traditional practices of tenancy, but the reforms had not brought equality in ownership rights at the gross root level. The prevailing inequality in ownership rights has given rise to a category of families that had remained landless. The system of sharecropping that resulted from agrarian transformations in valley of Kashmir prevalent for the last two decades provided opportunities to these landless people to earn their livelihood by tilling land for others.

The main occupation of villagers is tilling of land in one way or the other; in the village the system of cultivating land is not confined to owned land only but peasants having small holding size cultivates on the land which is not owned by them. The system of sharecropping provides opportunities

to the landless villagers to earn their livelihood by tilling land for the land owner and sharing the produce on some predetermined basis. Cultivating land is primary occupation of villagers along with that villagers are earning their livelihood by other subsidiary occupations like manufacturing various kinds of handicraft items, Kangri making, business of Kangri selling and shop keeping. In the village families that are leasing-out their land are employed in occupations other than agriculture such as public sector job. The present study was conducted in a Village of district Anantnag in Jammu and Kashmir State situated in Valley's south-western direction and known as the rice bowl of the valley which is known for cultivation of a variety of fruits especially apples.

On leased-out land various crops are cultivated like paddy, mustard, fodder, pulses and vegetables, 17% households of the village lease-out land for cultivation of said crops.

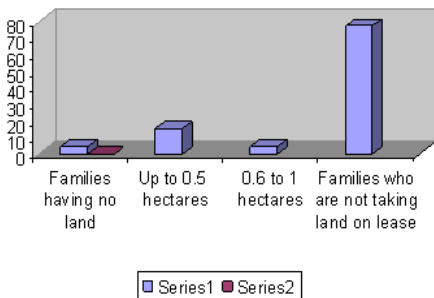
**Fig. 1: The system of lease-out of irrigated and un-irrigated land in the village**



**Source: Primary data collected by the Author**

Prevailing inequality in land ownership in the village is giving birth to a class of sharecroppers that work on the leased-in land for their survival. In the village 19% families are surviving on the processes of sharecropping. These families of the village can be divided into two broad categories. The first category is composed by peasants having small holding size and sharecropping helps them to increase their size of land for cultivation. The first category is constituted by the families that are taking up to 0.5 hectare of land on lease. This category is constituted by the small peasants and they constitute about 15% population of the village. The other category of the tenants in the village cultivates up to 1 hectares of leased-in land; in the village these families constitute about 4% of the total population of the village these families are cultivating their owned as well as leased-in land. In the village there are about 19% households that are earning their livelihood from sharecropping patterns.

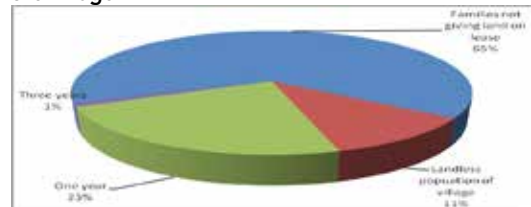
**Fig. 2: The system of leasing-in of irrigated and un-irrigated land in the village**



**Source: Primary data collected by the Author**

The time duration for leasing arrangements remains for a single cropping season and tenants are able to work on land just for a year, for which the contract is signed in the village. Why is land leased-out for one year only?.

**Fig. 3: Time duration for leasing-out of land in years in the village**



**Source: Primary data collected by the Author**

Production and its distribution is an important factor during lease arrangements, mostly in the village the share of the agricultural produce is 50:50, which indicates the system of production of crop sharing is based on equal distribution. During lease-in of land in the village the expenses on production are barred by both landowner and sharecropper, in the village while leasing-in of land production is equally distributed, that The means of production in the village can be divided in to two categories one is that of modern means of production like tractor's are owned by the land owner and the traditional means of production like bullock is owned by tenant in most of the cases the means of production are taken on hire on some predetermined basis.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The practices of sharecropping are prevalent in the village form various decades, before the agrarian reforms tenants were cultivating land for state and were forced to pay high taxes and after reform movements in 1950s and 1970s they started to cultivate the leased-in land for landowner for their survival. With the introduction of horticultural sector in the village sharecropping had emerged with new dimensions based on cultivation of cash crops and their distribution between the landowner and tenant. In the village the system of land-lease provides opportunities to not only landless populations to earn their livelihood by cultivating land for the landowner but also small peasants for extra agricultural produce and income. In the village before leasing-out land a contract is signed between landowner and tenant by determining the extent of sharing produce and time duration for the entire contract. In the process of production tenants are solely responsible for the inputs on production until the harvesting operations.

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