

## **AVANTIVARMAN (A.D 855-883) THE ENGINEER KING OF KASHMIR: IRRIGATIONAL WORKS AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract:** With fertile soil and abundant water supply, Kashmir had been from earliest times depending mainly on agriculture as the principle food and wealth. Due to political stability and favorable peace conditions 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. Besides the irrigation minister Suyya helped the king in all these activities.

**Keywords:** *Dhanya, Yava, Vitasta, Sindhu, Rajatarangni, Nilmatpurana*

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**INTRODUCTION:** During ancient period agriculture was the main occupation of the people of Kashmir. 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* and *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. The seeds of rice were sown in the month of *Chaitra* (March) and by the month of *Asvina* (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 *Kartika* (October) after which the new crops (*Navana*) were cultivated. The other crops cultivated were *Yava* (barley) and pulses. The *Yava* (barley), according to the evidence furnished by the *Nilmatapurana* ripened in the month of *Asadha* (June). According to M. A. 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 (*mosoor*) and black gram (*moong*). 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, the Chinese traveler who visited Kashmir in 630-31 A.D. Apples (*Palevata*) were also cultivated. The cultivation of saffron has been a monopoly of Kashmir from earliest times. <sup>(1)</sup>

However, the beautiful valley was regularly hit by disastrous floods caused by the overflow of *Mahapadma Lake* (Wular lake), thus, damaging paddy and other crops. The Karkota king Lalitaditya Muktapida (A.D 724-760) had done something to improve matters, but under the misgovernment of his successors the country had reverted to its former condition, and by frequent flooding of the land, the price of one *khari* of rice had risen to ten hundred and fifty *dinars* in the times of famine, and two hundred in times of bumper crops. Kalhana says that Suyya, the able irrigation minister of Avantivarman, “who by his religious merit, achieved in a single birth the holy work which Vishnu accomplished in four incarnations- the raising of the earth from the water- by the granting of land to worthy *Brahmanas*, the building of stone

embankments to hold up the water, and the subjugation of water-demon *Kaliya*, reduced the price of one *khari* of rice to thirty-six dinars.<sup>(2)</sup>

The methods by which this great work was achieved are summarized by M.A Stein. Before becoming irrigation minister, Suyya always used to say to his friends and 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 the king 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 and 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 government treasury & proceeded in a boat towards his destination. Reaching the village of *Yaksadara* (near Khadanyar, Baramullah), he threw some (handful) coins into the river and moved away from the scene quickly. Some people thought he had gone mad and were therefore watching his methods with a strange curiosity. But here was an opportunity for them to get money. Therefore, at once the people jumped into the river and started searching the money, while doing so they dragged out the river rocks and boulders. For two or three days Suyya repeated his so called foolish process and the people made their fortune, cleaning the river of all the bulky and weighty material. This notable engineer then blocked the whole river by the construction of a dam of stones at a suitable site and 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. There operations took another seven days and 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 and 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.<sup>(3)</sup>

Another great work of engineering undertaken by Suyya was the change in the confluence of the *Vitasta* (Jhelum) and its most important tributary, the *Sindhu*. Formerly, it was near *Trihgama* in the Lar pargana that the *Vitasta* (Jhelum) and *Sindhu* rivers met and thus, turning a large area of cultivable land into a swamp. But Suyya changed their junction to the present place near Srinagar and made their combined waters flow through the Walur Lake. Along the new course stone embankments were constructed for a length of seven *Yojanas* (about 42 miles). The course of many important tributaries was regulated in a similar way. As a result 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 and therefore the name of Kundala.<sup>(4)</sup>

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 13 km long takes its water from river *Vitasta* (Jhelum) at Shadipur and 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 Nallah Anantnag at Lassipur. It is 30 Km long and 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 and 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. The all hard work was done by Suyya but the credit goes to Avantivarman who provided all facilities to his irrigation minister and never ever such type of facilities were provided by any king to his able ministers.<sup>(5)</sup>

### 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 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. There is no greater name in history of Kashmir than Avantivarman. His reign is famous for bringing Agricultural Revolution in the valley of Kashmir.

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