

Revolutionizing Agriculture: Zainul Abidin's Visionary Irrigational Reforms

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Abstract: This article explores the remarkable agricultural reforms and humanitarian initiatives implemented by Kashmiri Sultan Zainul Abidin (1420-1470). Focusing on his innovative measures to mitigate famine and promote agricultural development, this study highlights Sultan's construction of iconic canals such as Shah Kul, Martand Canal, Chakdar canal, Kakapur canal, Karala canal, Avantipur canal, Lalkul canal, Mar canal, and Zainagir canal. These infrastructure projects demonstrated Zainul Abidin's commitment to the welfare of his people.

Key words: Zainul Abidin, canals, Kashmir, agriculture.

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I. Introduction:

Zainul Abidin Abidin, a ruler of the Shah Mir dynasty, is regarded as one of the greatest kings of Kashmir. He ruled from 1420 to 1470 CE. His reign is considered a golden era in Kashmir's history. He was a visionary leader who introduced innovative administrative reforms, encouraged art and craft, promoted musical development, and upheld the principles of religious harmony. Jonaraja, the court biographer of Zain ul Abidin records that the corrupt judges were severely dealt with. Sultan provided his subjects with a code of laws and had them all engraved on copper plates and placed them in public markets and halls of justice. He was a great builder. He founded the towns of Zainagar (Nowshahr), Zainagir, Zainapur and Zainakot. Remains of his numerous towns, villages and bridges still exist and bear his name.

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of the state and Zain ul Abidin paid special attention to the promotion of agriculture. He built floating islands on which crops were sown. He drained the marshes and brought large areas under cultivation. He added to the length of Jarib or the chain, and the yard but the detail is not available. What the Tabaqat records "in Kindness to the *raiyyat* he increased the length of the yard measure and of the chain beyond what had been customary". Land assessment was revised, being reduced to a seventh in some places. Village folk and farmers were further protected from the exactions of revenue officers by a law which prohibited the latter from accepting any gifts. He developed the irrigation system by making a number of tanks, canals and dams. The author of Tabakat-I-Akbari said "no monarch of Kashmir had worked towards constructing the nation, fostering agriculture, and digging canals as much as Budshah". The following is the list of important canals which were constructed by him:

- **The Shahkul or Safapur canal:** It carried the waters of the Sind river across the Tehsil of Lar to the lands around the Mansbal lake in the present district Ganderbal. The canal irrigates many villages from Manigam to Safapur. At Safapur Sultan built a palace which he named Bagh -e- Safa.
- **The Shah Kul or Martand canal:** The canal takes its water from the river Lidder to irrigate the arid plateau of Matan in district Anantnag. This enabled the sultan to make efforts to grow sugarcane in this area. However the experiment failed due to the unfavourable climatic conditions for the crop.
- **The Chakdar canal:** This canal originated from Nandmarg pass in the Pir Panjal Range and irrigated the plateau of Chakdar.
- **The Kakapur canal:** It irrigated the lands around the village of Kakapur (Kakapur is ancient Utpalpora).
- **The Karala canal:** This canal irrigated the land lying between Shupiyan and Romuh (that is a village about ten miles north of Shupiyan). It was on the banks of this canal that the sultan built the town of Zainapur.

- **The Avantipur canal:** This canal irrigated the lands around Avantipur. A portion of this canal ran as far as the villages of Midpur and Rajpur.
- **The Lall Kul or the Puhru canal:** It carried the water from the river Puhru river from Bunagam (Pohru) where the river was dammed up and irrigated arid lands lying between the Wular lake and the left bank of Pohru river. Here the sultan founded the new town of Zainagir.
- **The Mar canal or Nalla Mar:** The canal was built by Sultan in srinagar to protect the city from floods. Previously the surplus waters of the Dal lake flowed out into the Jehlum at Habba Kadal. But the Sultan diverted the waters of the lake into Mar canal which he extended up to Shadipur where it emptied itself at the confluence of the Jehlum and Sind.
- **Zainagair canal (Baodh Koul:** the canal waters the region of Zainagir(a group of villages found in the Jammu and Kashmir province of Baramulla's Sopore constituency). It is a 47 Km long canal and It's source is a sublet of Nallah Madhumati in Bandipora district. Nahre Zainageer is a tributary of the Jhelum river. The canal irrigates 12900 acres of land in the Zainagir region.

“There was not a piece of land, nor a forest, where the monarch did not construct a canal”, said Jonaraja. Owing to these irrigation works, the draining of marshes and the reclamation of large areas for cultivation, Kashmir became self-sufficient in food and rice became cheap. According to Moorcraft, the produce of rice in Zainul Abidin's time was Seventy-seven lakes of kharwars. The revenue was realized in kind and granaries were built to store the grain. Whenever the price of rice went up or there was a famine, the government immediately brought out its stocks to bring down the prices and to feed the people. From the fact that in time of a famine the rent was reduced to one fourth and in some place even to one seventh, it is concluded that state's share must have been one-half or one third of the produce.

Towards the end of his reign a severe famine occurred in kashmir. The contemporary historian, Srivara, gives frightening accounts of the sufferings of the people. The immediate cause of the famine was an early fall of snow which completely destroyed the ripe paddy. The chronicler records “ A hungry man distressed with the thought of what he should eat entered a house at night, and discarding gold and other riches, stole rice from a pot. Weakened men in village longed to obtain rice. A large number of people died. Famine stricken people ate leaves, roots and even twigs of trees. Formerly one khari of paddy could be had for three hundred dinnars but owing to the famine the same khari of paddy could not be obtained even for 1500”.

The king exerted every muscle to alleviate the sufferings of the people. He gave out paddy from his and government stores free to the hungry people. Fortunately the following year's crop was a bumper one which quickly relieved the distress of the people. After normal conditions were restored the black marketers and hoarders who had swindled the people by selling foodstuffs at higher rates were punished and made to return the excess of the prices charged by them. He also canceled all the debts incurred by needy people in their hour of distress.

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