

BRIDGING THE PAST AND PRESENT: AN ANALYSIS OF SULTAN ZAINUL ABIDIN'S LEGACY THROUGH THE ZAINGAIR CANAL IN KASHMIR

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Abstract

Sultan Zainul Abidin, popularly known as "Budshah," was a 15th-century ruler of Kashmir who left a lasting impact on the region's socio-economic landscape. Among his many contributions, the Zaingair Canal, which he commissioned for irrigation and transportation purposes, stands out as a significant feat of engineering. Despite its historical importance, the canal's legacy has been largely forgotten in modern-day Kashmir. This research paper aims to bridge the gap between the past and present by analyzing the impact of Sultan Zainul Abidin's legacy through the Zaingair Canal. Through a comprehensive review of historical texts, as well as fieldwork conducted in the Zaingair area, this paper will explore the canal's significance in the context of Kashmir's development, and shed light on its potential for revitalization in the present day.

Keywords: *Zainul Abidin, Budshah, Zaingair Canal, Kashmir, Socio-Economic, Irrigation.*

INTRODUCTION

Zaingair is a group of villages found in the Jammu and Kashmir province of Baramulla's Sopore constituency. With around 38 hamlets, it is the biggest region in Sopore. Wadoora, Warpora, Goripora, Hathlangoo, Saidpora, Dooru, Darpora, Botingoo, Bomai, Tujar, Brath, Dangerpora, and Zaloor are the principal settlements that make up Zaingair. The Zaingair gets its name from Zainul Abidin, who is credited with founding Zinageer, a town that bears his name and is still recognized by that name. The historic area is now a collection of several little villages in the area of Sopore, extending from Sagipora in the district of Kupwara to Watlab at the northwestern end of Wular Lake in the district of Baramulla. People have always honored the Sultan's role in the foundation of Zainagair.

The most of Sultan's construction work at Zaingair was not salvageable. The bridge the Sultan had constructed in 1452 connecting Anderkote to Sopore is still standing, despite the fact that hardly much of the infrastructure he constructed during his fifty-year reign has survived. After defeating his own son Haji Khan, who had invaded Zainagair and tried to take his father's kingdom, the sultan erected the bridge to block future assaults. The causeway offers a different route through Tarzoo from Sopore to central Kashmir. The whole Sopore town as well as the surrounding Zainageer had been destroyed by the battle. The army of the Sultan's son Haji set fire to every home. According to historians "After the conflict, the Sultan apologized to the people who had lost lives and property and had all the homes and markets repaired." At Zainageer, a sizable palace was constructed, and it was encircled by a lovely garden. It was lavishly decorated by the Sultan with residences fit for his officers, courtiers, and erudite men. The Chak monarch burned the Sultan's palace on fire twice, but the monarch rebuilt it better than before. As a result of the festivities between the Shahmirs and Chaks, the Zainageer-Sopore belt suffered periodically. According to reports, one of the Chak commanders burned the Sultan's palace at Zainagair on fire before escaping to Trehgam, which is today a border settlement in Kupwara, in north Kashmir. The Sultan responded by seizing their land and possessions. The Sultan finally ordered all the Chaks

executed, with the exception of women and children, when the Chaks tried to set fire to the whole Zainagair district once again. The same he has done in constructing the great water channel known as Zaingair canal.

History of the Irrigation System

Canals are the most important way to get water to crops and the most important part of our history and cause of civilization. Water was the driving force behind the rise and fall of great civilizations. The history of civilizations may be summarized by looking at the development of canal systems. The commencement of the canal system coincided with the advent of agriculture. Because of the quantity of water and the availability of fertile land, Kashmir has relied on agriculture as its primary industry since ancient times. The extensive network of canals that have developed in the valley to transport water to the crops is a reflection of the evolution of agriculture. Farmers have significantly benefited from the valley's geography as they have built small gravity canals known as Kuhls. Throughout ancient times, the valley's rulers have worked hard to create irrigation systems to support agricultural growth. Zain ul Abideen has made the most significant contribution in this field of all the Kashmiri rulers. He has constructed several canals, including the well-known Zaingair Canal, which irrigates the Zaingair region.

In Kashmir, irrigation systems have been in use for centuries. Primary literature like the Nilmata Purana and Rajatarangini has described it. The use of secondary sources expands the scope of the investigation. According to the Nilmata Purana, Kashmir has no established regular irrigation system. Yet, the name "Adevamatrika" found in the Nilmata Purana indicates that the valley's primary irrigation supply was its lakes, rivers, and fountains. Due to the abundance of water that aids in irrigation, the geography of the valley makes irrigation of the land fairly simple. In relation to this, Lawrence states that "there is hardly any area of the valley that cannot be watered due to the heights at which water may be taken." Yet there were certain places where there was a sense of shortage. The Kashmiri kings sometimes took a variety of actions to provide farmers with irrigation. King Suvarna made the first effort in this direction during the pre-Ashokan era by building the "Suvanamanikulya" canal (present Suman Kul). During the early middle ages, Lalitaditya and Avantiwarman made improvements to the irrigation system. They are known in Kashmiri history for coming up with new ways to water crops. To increase the amount of land under cultivation, Muslim sultans built canals. Under Sultan Zain ul Aiden's rule, the canal building saw its most significant construction (1420–1470). Both new and rehabilitated canals were constructed. Pin-soled shoes were not permitted on the canal's banks during the Dogra era, which led to greater regard for the preservation of the canal. Under the Dogra reign in 1935, the canal underwent repairs and renovations at a cost of Rs 10.50 lakh. Only until the Land Settlements in 1888–1889 the state began maintaining irrigation canals. The creation of the Irrigation Department as a distinct organization in November 1923 was the key move in this respect.

Zaingair Canal

Nahre Zainageer (BAEDH KOUL), is incredible that we got from our forefathers is a great gift of the past, The author of Tabakat-i-Akbari said that "no monarch of Kashmir had worked towards constructing the nation, fostering agriculture, and digging canals as much as Budshah." Despite building new water canals, he has maintained regular relationships with the majority of Kashmir's rulers. "There was not a piece of land, nor a forest, where the monarch did not construct a canal," said Jonaraja, the court biographer of Zain ul Abideen. The Canal almost floods the whole Zaingair region. Zain ul Abideen made several improvements to Kashmir's irrigation system, many of which are still in use today and are

essential to the majority of agricultural-related operations. One of the better examples of these improvements is the Zaingair Canal, a well-known canal that is 47 kilometers long.

Its source is the well-known as a sublet of Nallah Madhumatti at Sonawari in Bandipora district. Nahre Zainageer is a tributary of the Jhelum, which is the only river in Kashmir valley. The apple orchards and hundreds of hectares of rice fields that are the foundation of Zainageer's economy are irrigated by Nahre Zainagair. The whole agricultural region located in the Zaingair blocks and Sopore is irrigated by the canal. The Canal irrigates 12,900 acres of land in the Zaingair region. Among these, 2,700 acres of vegetable land, 400 acres of orchards and 9,800 acres are used for the production of paddy. From the town of Botingoo, further sublets of the Zaingair canal extend over the whole area. It is important to note that Zain ul Abideen rerouted the Pohru Canal into the Nehre Zaingair when there wasn't enough water for the extensive agricultural area. But the Pohru channel was destroyed following Sultan's passing, and the river resumed its natural path. It is simply not one canal, but it is a network of canals and streams. From its inception to the settlement of Pazalpora village, it flows across mountain ranges. The canal at Pazalpora splits into two distributaries on the left and right sides. The Distributary First which provides water to the localities of Botingoo, Warpora, Janwara, Hathlungoo, etc., is located on its left side. The Distributary Second which distributes water to the villages of Bohripora, Saidpor, Duroo, Dangerpora, etc., is located on its right side. It's amazing how gravity affects water flow while maintaining a consistent discharge rate at each connection. The intended flow via this canal is 10 cubic meters. But, during the irrigation season, this is being used to the extent of 7 cumecs.

Zaingair Canal's Contribution to the Zaingair Territory

After the discussion of the Zaingair Canal's history, the primary focus now is on the canal's impact on the Zaingair region. Sultan Zain ul Abideen was the one who first created the Canal. Nevertheless, it wasn't until 1923 that the Irrigation Department was founded as a distinct organization. Between 1931 and 1940, several canals were built and widened, and the Zaingair Canal was also extended to further villages during this period. The journey from Bandipora to Dangerpora was completed in almost twenty years. The canal was built with the intention of irrigating the whole community, where there were no irrigation facilities and hence no crops. The canal was built to increase the amount of land that could be farmed and to help the population become self-sufficient in food grains. Hence, the construction of Canal was a godsend for the whole Zaingair region. The Canal has made a significant contribution to the Zaingair region's economic stability and self-sufficiency.

Contribution to the Economy

Since the canal has the ability to generate economic activity, it has made great contributions to the development of the economy of the village, including the following:

It makes a considerable contribution to the total agricultural output of the region. Agriculture is essential to the economy of the whole region, whether directly or indirectly. The existence of an adequate irrigation system is required in order to practice agriculture. The word "irrigation" refers to the use of artificial methods or processes that are used to provide water to the ground in regions when natural precipitation is inadequate. The irrigation system not only helps farmers but, become less reliant on rainwater for agricultural purposes, and it also plays a significant part in the overall production of agricultural goods. Almost sixty percent of the population now relies on agriculture for their livelihood, and this level of reliance would not be feasible without the irrigation supply that is provided by the Canal. Since the canal was built, there has been a discernible change in the way that the land is cultivated. This

change has been beneficial. There was an increase in the amount of land that was cultivated, particularly for paddy. Before the construction of the canal, the whole region was parched, despite the fact that there was a plentiful supply of land.

Only grain and pulse crops, such as corn, wheat, mash, and the like, were grown for cultivation. Paddy (Dhanya) wasn't grown, so most people ate maize (Makai Waath), even though it wasn't enough. People didn't know much about rice back then, so when they found rice grain for the first time, they called it "stalk borer" (khod kyum). Rice agriculture began in this region almost entirely as a direct result of the canal, and now around 59 percent of the area is used for the production of paddy rice. This piece of land is totally reliant on the canal's water supply for irrigation. These rice paddies get their water supply from the canal via a series of smaller outlets. The amount of food produced by the crop is sufficient to feed the family until the next harvest. There are certain families who own large tracts of land and obtain the extra product. These families also sell the food at a fair price. Those that lack access to land must rely on the state for their food supply, which is distributed on a monthly basis. After the rice has been threshed, the residual grass is preserved; is this grass fed to domestic animals, or is it also sold? The cultivation of vegetables and fruits, in addition to paddy, benefits from the canal's presence. The fruit industry, and especially the apple sector, is the primary driver of economic activity across the whole region. Zaingair is an important contributor to the apple production in Sopore, which is why the town is also known as the Apple Town of Kashmir.

Dry-land and orchard trees need irrigation, and water is also required when pesticides are sprayed. Canal water is utilized for both of these needs. In terms of vegetables, the availability of irrigation led to a rise in output, and as time went on, new veggies were also produced. In the past, the Canal Tolsag system was widely used in the region and was used to irrigate crops. The Tolsag irrigation system was challenging, but with the completion of the canal, it was replaced with gravity irrigation, and people saw a difference in how simple it was. The area planted in paddy has been shrinking over time. Because of the expanding population, farmers have either built on their property or used it for various non-agricultural commercial operations in an effort to find new sources of revenue. The most sage among them turned their former paddy fields into apple orchards, in part because rice will never provide greater returns per kanal than the fruit does.

Employment

The canal also contributes to the creation of jobs. The locals of the region played a significant role as laborers in the building of the canal alongside the government. From the beginning of time, the state has been entirely reliant on the labor the general populace has contributed. Villager labor along the canal lines provided the state and various other segments of society with material rewards for the building, rebuilding, and upkeep of these canals. The salaries paid to the people who labored on this canal were around 8 anas. Even now, whenever the Irrigation and Flood Control Agency launches a repair program, the services of individuals are used, for which they are paid by the contractor.

Domestic Contribution

Even though water is needed in agricultural areas, it is also needed in our homes. Water is released for the canal throughout the summer, beginning in May and continuing until the month of September. At this time, water is utilized for irrigation as well as other things. They utilized the water from wells and ponds when there was no access to tap water. Yet after the construction of the canal, people started using the water from the canal to meet their household water requirements, such as drinking, washing, and

bathing. Women who lived next to the canal cleaned their dishes there every day and washed their clothing there as well. This custom of washing clothes in the canal still exists, but on a smaller scale. At that time, the canal's water was so clean and pure that people even used to drink it. The fact that the canal water is no longer utilized for drinking is what has changed. Yet, when tap water is scarce, other household requirements may be met using canal water.

Contribution to Culture

In addition to helping the region's economy and daily life, the canal has also had a big impact on the region's culture. As was already said, maize (also called Makai Waath) was the main food source for the people who lived there. As a direct result of building the canal, which also led to the start of paddy farming, rice has taken over maize as the main source of food in the hamlet. Contribution has also been seen in how the women of the village talked to each other while getting water from the canal and washing clothes especially during festivals, as well as the men of the village talked to each other while working in their paddy fields.

How the Canal Looks Right Now

This remarkable water supply that kept us alive throughout the droughts is owed a great deal of gratitude on our part. Now the canal is pleading with the people around it for assistance. The canal plays a significant role in our economy and is a significant element of our heritage. The canal was previously in excellent shape, but today it is in poor condition because people have encroached on its banks, which were once about five meters high but are now just 1.5 meters. The soil from the banks is used to fill in the land and to build other things. Referring to the residential streets, the canal has been turned into a drain where trash from homes can go. It was a gift to us that would last forever, but now people have turned it into a dump. All the trash and plastic bags are put in it and along the sides of the canal. The construction of roadways along the canal's banks is making the situation much worse. MGNREGA destroyed the banks of the canal by building roads along them. But maintenance and de-silting programs are started every year, but they don't do anything because authorities and people don't pay attention or care. People easily erode the soil, and poplar trees are uprooted for building projects without caring. A decade ago, there were thousands of mulberry trees along the banks of the canal. Now, there are no signs of greenery along the banks. If you walk along the canal, you can feel Nahre Zainageer's pain and hear her silent sobs.

Certainly, I am at a loss for words to express. The banks of the canal used to have the famous Kashmiri willows, but the authorities haven't been paying attention or taking care of the area, so there's nothing left to clean up. Trees are the main things that keep the ecosystem in balance, but we have no place for them now. We are losing water at an alarming rate. Humans are constantly concerned with themselves. The government has to take the lead to protect this heritage that is going away. Campaigns to raise awareness are a waste of money and time. People are smart enough to know what heritage is and what it means. Again, it's the government that has gone to sleep. The government is shelling out millions of rupees every year to cover the salaries of its officials and security personnel in an effort to curb the illegal exploitation of natural resources. If the current state of the Nahre Zainageer continues as it is, there will be no Nahre Zainageer in some years, and there will also be no agriculture in the area around it. But where exactly is the problem?

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights the significance of Sultan Zainul Abidin's legacy in Kashmir through the Zaingair Canal. The canal, which was constructed during the Sultan's reign, served as a means of irrigation and transportation for the people of the region. It also played a pivotal role in the economic and cultural development of Kashmir. The study employed a historical and geographical approach to examine the canal's impact on the region's economy, culture, and society. The research found that the canal was not only a functional infrastructure but also a cultural symbol of the Sultan's rule. It was a testament to the Sultan's vision for a prosperous and thriving Kashmir. The study also sheds light on the importance of preserving and maintaining historical infrastructures such as the Zaingair Canal. As a cultural heritage site, the canal holds immense value for the people of Kashmir and serves as a link between the past and present. Overall, this research provides a deeper understanding of the legacy of Sultan Zainul Abidin and his contributions to the development of Kashmir. It emphasizes the need to acknowledge and appreciate the historical significance of cultural heritage sites like the Zaingair Canal and the importance of preserving them for future generations.

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