

**DEPEASANTIZATION: A STUDY OF NATURE, MAGNITUDE
AND POSSESSION OF LAND IN PULWAMA DISTRICT OF
KASHMIR VALLEY (INDIA)**

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Abstract

Depeasantization represents a specific form of deagrarinization in which peasants lose their economic capacity, social coherence and demographically shrink in size. Over the last several decades, the rural Kashmir has experienced the process of depeasantization where peasants have experienced an erosion, in the agrarian way of life. A significant number of peasants have sold a part of land or full land in order to fulfill the demands of everyday life like construction of new house/s, buying a new vehicle, expenditure on marriage, to get a new furniture. Due to fragmentation of land into small income landholdings and also low yield of crops and lack of market facilities the land has become unproductive at many rural areas the land has been taken by government for developmental projects initiated by the state and central government. This is evident from the various studies carried out in the area of depeasantization studies. Based on a sample of 250 respondents and using an intensive approach through the case study method and interview schedule, the study has been carried out in the rural areas of Pulwama district of the Kashmir valley and aimed to highlight the nature and magnitude of depeasantization in the study area. The study showed that the most of the land has been sold by the marginal and small peasants, who find it increasingly hard to sustain on farming and are getting pushed out from the agricultural sector.

Keywords: Depeasantization, nature, magnitude, possession of land, reasons, Pulwama district, Kashmir.

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1. Introduction

The process of shifting of peasants from agricultural to non-agricultural sector for an alternate source of livelihood is known as depeasantization.¹Depeasantization is a specific form of deagrarinization in which peasants lose their economic capacity, social coherence and demographically shrinking in size.²Thus, it can be said that de-agrarinization is a broader term which means moving of societal social structure from farming to non-farming sector whereas, depeasantization is specific form of deagrarinization in which peasants lose their size demographically.

Depeasantization is the shrinking size of peasant's practices or small producers from the land.³Depeasantization refers to the erosion of agrarian way of life that combines subsistence and commodity agricultural production with an internal social organization based on family labour and village community settlement. Most commonly measured through rates of urbanization, it seems to be irrefutable that depeasantization is occurring at an ever-increasing pace.⁴As cited by Araghi, A. Farshad (2012) in his work "Global Depeasantization, 1945-1990" that (Johnson, 2004) refutes the fact that urbanization of the planet is a key indicator of the death of the peasantry. Johnson considers that it is too narrow a view to parallel the trend that sees a decrease in the rural population to a decrease in the peasantry. It is argued that depeasantization is contested, at the most basic level, the utter destruction of the peasantry is challenged; he argued that the peasant way of life will always exist in some form. If the peasantry is a unit engaged in a form of production based solely on agriculture, then Johnson considers that the world is indeed witnessing a process of widespread depeasantization. If seen as a population whose form of production remains driven by subsistence and retains some control over the means of production, however, the peasantry still exists as populations employ diverse mechanisms to meet household needs. Araghi in this study "Global Depeasantization, 1945-1990" defines that peasant production as meeting all needs through exclusively agricultural activity. Reliance upon remittance, therefore, is seen as representative of depeasantization. Normally measured through population censuses, rural-urban migration represents a process that Araghi in this study identifies as deruralization.⁵This process, causing a depopulation and decline of rural areas and resulting in over urbanization as people concentrate in urban areas, is the primary coping mechanism used by rural populations. It is the central feature of depeasantization, which he defines as a process

where an increasing number of people who were involved in agriculture with direct access to the production of their means of subsistence become rapidly and massively concentrated in urban areas.⁶It is argued that within the peasant studies there is a major cleavage between those that advocate the *disappearance thesis* and those that support the *permanence thesis*. Both attempt to situate the historical course of the peasantry within the development of society, although the disappearance thesis is far more common than that of permanence. The disappearance thesis is premised on the idea that capitalism will lead to the dissolution of the peasantry as individuals become wage workers in urban areas and capitalist farmers in the countryside. The permanence thesis, by contrast, argues that peasant societies do not abide by the laws of individualistic capital and have a developmental logic of their own that will result in the survival of both the peasantry and the conditions of its reproduction.⁷A key component of the disappearance thesis, present in the work of Marx and Engels is the sense that peasants are a class representative of barbarism, unable to shape history and blocking the development of civilization. For civilization to progress, therefore, the peasantry must dissolve as society moves from a traditional to a modern state.⁸Araghi identifies three key variants in the disappearance thesis: the first allows for historical variation rather than a unilinear progress to dissolution; the second identifies the persistence of the peasantry, explaining it as a result of functionality within capitalism, but arguing this as a temporary state as capitalist farms become dominant; the third argues that “essence”and “appearance”must be considered separately, and that remaining peasant societies are actually concealed rural proletariats.⁹

For rural agricultural populations in Africa, the policies implemented resulted in the removal of agricultural subsidies and price supports, land deregulation, wage freezes, and the devaluation of national currencies. In this context of high risks and low returns, small-scale peasant farmers were unable to compete. Industrialization strategies had already resulted in a reliance on imports or food aid for basic food. Vulnerability and exposure to world markets and price fluctuations for agricultural producers increased this dependency, while negatively impacting the purchasing power of whole populations.¹⁰

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2. Depeasantization as a process

The transformation of workforce from farming to non-farming sector can be divided into two categories, namely growth-led shift and distress-induced shift. The growth-led shift is related to developmental factors like mechanization of agriculture, increasing employment, income, high education level, rampant urbanization, development of secondary and tertiary sectors, and state intervention for generating employment opportunities and so on. These factors are known as “pull factors” which attract the workforce from farming to more lucrative non-farm activities. On the other hand, distress-induced transformation is based on hardship or crisis driven factors like falling productivity, increasing costs, decreasing returns, unemployment, underemployment, unproductive land, marketing problem, no or less subsidy provided by the government etc. These factors are known as “push factors” which force the agriculture workforce from farming towards non-farm activities to eke out their livelihood.¹² These factors are extremely responsible for depeasantization in rural Kashmir.

3. Review of literature

Singh, K. (2014)¹³ in his study points out that the crisis in agriculture has manifested itself in the form of stagnating productivity, rising cost of production, decelerating income, shrinking employment, mounting indebtedness and ecological imbalance. One of the main consequences of this agrarian distress has been that the marginal and small farmers, who find it increasingly hard to sustain on farming, are getting pushed out from agricultural sector. The fact remains that there

is a decline in the proportion of cultivators in the total workforce of the state that has added to the unemployed or semi employed force, and has put pressure on an already over-crowded agricultural labour market. **Dora, S. E. (2016)**¹⁴ in the study reveals that the process of liberalization in fact proved more disastrous for agriculture and peasantry in India because it was adopted without resolving the fundamental agrarian problems or contradictions such as an absolute in egalitarian land structure, depeasantization, and abysmal condition of agricultural labour, tenants and small peasants. Though India chiefly inherited most of these problems or contradictions from the British rule, it did too little to resolve them after independence. During the period of economic reforms, state did nothing to transform the depressed traditional institutional framework of agriculture because it believed that the barrier to lifting up agricultural surplus or growth and consequently to rural development could be surmounted with following the structural adjustment programme of neo-liberalism. But in reality the opposite happened, and the traditional agrarian contradictions in effect acquired bigger shape by getting associated with the new contradictions generated by the liberalization process. **Hassn, Z. Md. & Islam, R. Md. (2013)**¹⁵ in the study revealed that geographically speaking, Bangladesh is a small country but bears a huge population resulting in a very high density of population and very high intensity of land and resource use. They admitted that two significantly prominent phenomena drives country's overall scenario of economic development and environment imbalance are the high growth rate of population engulfing precious land for settlement and scarcity of land for ever increasing demand of food. Every year country is losing 1 percent arable land due to the population growth its infrastructure use is increasing and agricultural land is decreasing gradually. The author points out that Rajshahi District was selected as study area because of its relatively higher growth in infrastructure development under various regional development programs. It was found that the land use pattern of Rajshahi District is changing over the last several decades. Among various causes of agricultural land losses the infrastructural development is the most important cause. The agricultural land of the study area is losing 0.46 percent per year and area under infrastructure use is increasing 5.86 percent per year. If this rate is steadily progressing, within next 217 years the agricultural land will be totally empty. **C, B. Nagaraja. A, Kavitha. & K, R. Somashekar. (2015)**¹⁶ in the study admitted that agriculture is crucial in terms of employment, food security and budgetary allocation, even though the share of agriculture income has decreased in the national market. In the growing population it's important

to conserve and protect the potential farmlands. Vertical construction should be promoted. The government should ensure the developmental projects in certain areas other than productive agriculture land, strengthen the zoning regulation and enact policies to reduce agriculture land losses. The farmers with productive agriculture land should be economically compensated to keep their land agriculturally active than selling it to developmental projects.

4. Research methodology.

4.1. Universe of the study

The universe of the present study constitutes *Pulwama* district of *Kashmir* valley as it has been worst hit by the process of depeasantization as compared to other districts. The thrust areas were *Lethpora, Pampore, Lasipora, Lasjan, Kakpora, Ratnipora, Rajpora, Koil, Malangpora and Awantipora* (10 in total). As per census 2011, the total literacy rate of the district *Pulwama* was 65 percent; 75.41 percent of males and 53.81 percent of females, respectively. The district consisted 328 villages, 5 towns and total population was 5, 60,440 persons out of which urban population was 80,462 while as rural was 4, 79,978 and it had a total of 40,658 rural households.

4.2. Sampling plan and design of the study

The sampling plan of the present study is based on a sample of 250 respondent's selected through cluster and purposive sampling method from rural areas of *Pulwama* district of *Kashmir*. Descriptive research design was used to get information from the respondents within the study area and the information was collected through interview schedule. One village from each thrust area was taken for study and out of each village 25 households were chosen for study ($25 \times 10 = 250$) which formed the sample of the study

4.3. Objectives of the study

1. To understand the nature and magnitude of depeasantization in the study area,
2. To examine the type of land sold and in possession and the location of land,
3. To identify the type of peasants involved mostly in depeasantization process,
4. To trace the reasons for depeasantization in the study area.

5. Results and Analysis

The findings of the study are as under:

5.1. Nature of depeasantization in rural Kashmir

Over the past several decades the rural Kashmir has experienced the process of depeasantization where peasants have seen an erosion in the agrarian way of life. A significant number of peasants have sold a part of land or full land in order to fulfill the demands of everyday life like, to construct a new houses, to buy a new vehicles, expenditure on marriage, to get a new furniture. Due to fragmentation of land into small income landholdings and also low yield of crops and lack of market facilities the land has become unproductive at many rural areas the land has been taken by government for developmental projects initiated by the state and central government. In this context, the respondents were asked to reveal their ideas regarding the nature of depeasantization in Kashmir as showed in the below table:

Table 1: Nature of depeasantization in Kashmir

Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Peasant at past	Yes	250	100.00
	No	0	0.00
Total		250	100.00
Peasant in present	Response	Number	Percentage
	Yes	150	60.00
	No	100	40.00
Total		250	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Type of peasant	Marginalized peasant	80	32.00
	landless peasant	50	20.00
	Small peasant	50	20.00
	Large peasant	70	28.00
Total		250	100.00

Sources: Field work carried out in rural Kashmir, 2018

The above table revealed that all the 250 respondents; (100 percent) were peasants in the past because they were cultivating their own land for self-consumption. At present, out of 250

respondents, 150 respondents (60 percent) claimed that they are peasants today because they are still working in their land and had sold only a part of land whereas, 100 respondents (40 percent) admitted that they have no land in their possession because they had sold full land. Peasant are those people who work themselves on their own land along with all the family members as a labourers in the field for the purpose of subsistence, their life revolves around agriculture using traditional farming methods of plough and animal power. In response to the question what type of peasant you possess, out of 250 respondents (80 respondents, 32 percent) admitted that they were marginalized peasants, 50 respondents (20 percent) claimed that they were landless peasants, 50 respondents (20 percent) revealed that they were small peasants and remaining 70 respondents (28 percent) said that they were large peasants. In the similar trend Doshi, L. S. & Jain, P.C. (1999)¹⁷ in the study “rural sociology” categories the peasants in term of landholding, they pointed out that large peasants are those who possess more than 15 acres of land whereas, small peasants are those who possess 2.5 to 5 acres of land, marginal peasants are those who own land below 2.5 acres of land. The peasants who earn their livelihood as sharecroppers and sub-tenants and have no land in their possession this is known as landless peasants.

5.2. Type of land in possession

Peasants in Kashmir mostly dependent on agriculture and other allied sectors, they grow different types of crops for self-consumption like paddy, orchards, maize, rice etc. The land is usually divided into irrigated, non-irrigated and orchard land. The land is further classified as Milkiyat land (land fully owned by peasant in paper and possession), Shamlayat land (land surrounding the Milkiyat land in possession of peasant), Sarkari land (state land) and Gascharie (community land). In this context, the respondents were asked to express their ideas about the type of land in their possession which is showed as in the below table:

Table 2: Type of land in possession

Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Type of land in your possession at present	Irrigated land	100	66.66
	Non irrigated land	20	13.33
	Orchard land	30	20.00
Total		250	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage

Type of land sold	Milkiyat land	90	90.00
	Shamlayat land	0	0.00
	Sarkari land	0	0.00
	Gascharie land	10	10.00
Total		250	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Location of land	Near to home	100	40.00
	Near to village	50	20.00
	Far away from home	100	40.00
Total		250	100.00

Sources: Based on field study carried out in Kashmir, 2018

The above table depicted that out of 250 respondents, 100 respondents (80 percent) admitted that they possessed irrigated land and 20 respondents (8 percent) said that they possessed non-irrigated land whereas, 30 respondents (12 percent) acclaimed that they have orchard land. The study further depicted that out of 100 respondents; 90 respondents (90 percent) said that they have sold Milkiyat land whereas 10 respondents, (10 percent) admitted that they have sold Gascharie. It was observed that in the present day agrarian society agricultural land is rapidly replaced into non-agricultural sector and demographically the size of peasants is decreasing which led to depeasantization in the rural Kashmir. In response to the question location of land, the study depicted that out 250 respondents, i.e. (100 percent) 100 respondents (40 percent) admitted that their land was located near to home and 50 respondents (20 percent) acclaimed that their land was located near to village and remaining 100 respondents (40 percent) revealed that their land was located far away from the home. It was noted in the study that they forced to sell their land due to lack of agricultural interest, poor condition of roads and lack of irrigation facilities, the intimacy between peasant and land has been declined.

5.3. Magnitude of depeasantization in rural Kashmir

Magnitude refers to the size, scale or importance of something or explosion. In the recent past agriculture scenario has undergone a tremendous change in Kashmir. Agricultural land has been the basic necessity of life and it is an important resource for the economic life of peasants. Although, it has been seen that most of people in rural areas across the India and particularly in

Kashmir are dependent on agriculture, the magnitude of depeasantization varies family to family and village to village. The rural people have sold either their full land or a half of it or it has been taken for developmental projects by the government. In this context, the respondents were asked to express their opinion regarding the magnitude of depeasantization which is showed as in the below table:

Table 3: Magnitude of depeasantization

Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
How much land sold	All of it	100	40.00
	A part of it	150	60.00
Total		250	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Land taken for developmental projects	Yes	150	60.00
	No	100	40.00
Total		250	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Reasons for taking land	Factories	70	46.68
	Colleges	10	6.66
	Banks	10	6.66
	Railway platform	60	40.00

Source: Field work carried out in rural Kashmir, 2018

The above table revealed that out of 250 respondents i.e. (100 respondents, 40 percent) had sold a part of the land, whereas 150 respondents (60 percent) admitted that they had sold all their land. It was observed during the study that children mostly force their parents to sell the land and shows little interest in the agricultural land. Although, it was found that elder generation was interested in the land but were unable to manage land due to many factors like increasing age, physical weakness etc.

The study further depicted that out of 250 respondents (150 respondents, 60 percent) admitted that their land had been taken for developmental projects initiated by the central and state government whereas, 100 respondents (40 percent) acclaimed that their land had not taken for

developmental projects. Out of 150 respondents; 60 respondents (40 percent) said that their land is been taken for factories, 20 respondents (13.33 percent) said that their land is taken by government for construction of college, 10 respondents (6.66 percent) admitted that their land is taken for the constructions of bank whereas, 60 respondents (40 percent) acclaimed that their land had taken for the railway platform in Kashmir. It was observed by the study that majority of the respondent's land had taken by the government for developmental projects in study area like highways, factories, railway platforms, bridges and other government and residential infrastructure. The agricultural land in Kashmir is diminishing day by day peasants are becoming landless, depeasantization has become a major problem in Kashmir.

5.4. Land possession of peasants in rural Kashmir

The average size of the operational holdings in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is about 0.76 hectare of land. The temperate zone of Kashmir has average land holdings as low as 0.53 hectare while cold arid zone of Ladakh has average land holdings as high as 1.08 hectares.¹⁸ In this context, the respondents were asked to reveal their land possession and the size of landholdings which is showed as in the below table:

Table 4: Land possession of peasants in Kashmir

Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Total land possession in the past	1-10 kanals	100	40.00
	11-20 kanals	100	40.00
	21-30 kanals	50	20.00
	31-40 kanals	0	0.00
	41-50 kanals	0	0.00
	50 and above	0	0.00
Total		250	100.00
Theme	Response	Number	Percentage
Total land possession at present	1-5 kanals	50	20.00
	6-10 kanals	60	24.00
	11-20 kanals	40	16.00
	21-30 kanals	0	0.00

	31-40 kanals	0	0.00
	41-50 kanals	0	0.00
	51 and above	0	0.00
	No land	100	40.00
Total		250	100.00

Sources: Based on field study carried out in Kashmir, 2018

The above table depicted that out of 250 respondents (100 respondents, 40 percent) admitted that in the past they possessed 1-10 kanals of land and 100 respondents (40 percent) said that they possessed 11-20 kanals of land and remaining 50 respondents (20 percent) admitted that they had 21-30 kanals of land. It was noted from the study that majority of the respondents were marginalized and small peasants whom land had been taken by the governmental for developmental projects. The small and marginal peasants after leaving farming are living in distress join mostly the labour class due to unskilful or low earning jobs, self-employment ventures for which their technical training is almost nil or rather very inadequate. It was found that marginal and small peasants faces lot of problem and challenges in their day to day life due to depeasantization, because they have not any other sources of income accept agriculture neither they are educated. The study further showed that out of 250 respondents i.e. (100 percent) 80 respondents (32 percent) possess 1-5 kanals of land in present, 60 respondents (24 percent) possess 6-10 kanals of land, 40 respondents (16 percent) having 11-20 kanals of land and remaining 100 respondents (40 percent) have no land in their possession. It was observed from the study that most of the peasant possess small landholdings and now they shows less interest on the agricultural land because the emotional attachment of peasant towards their land has been declined due to unproductive and non-profit able.

6. Conclusions

In the light of above findings it has been concluded that depeasantization has shown an increasing trend in Kashmir over the past two decades due to urbanization, migration from rural to urban areas, lack of interest among youth to work in the agricultural sector, attainment of higher education, non-profitable of land in nature, decreasing productivity, developmental projects initiated by the central and state government. Most of the respondents have sold their Milkiyat land, small and marginal peasants are pushed out from the agricultural sector, residential and

commercial buildings are coming up on the agricultural land, which need to be checked and curbed. It is unfortunate that in Kashmir some agricultural land is demographically changed into cities, colonies, by ongoing construction of hotels, homes, schools, shopping malls, commercial complexes, restaurants and huts. On the other hand, government is silent on such major issue not enforcing the laws to deal with and to stop such menace. However, the operational holdings of peasants are decreasing, landless peasants are leaving in stress and strain. It was noted that the small and marginal peasants after leaving farming are living in distress join mostly the labour class due to unskilful or low earning jobs, self-employment ventures for which their technical training is almost nil or rather very inadequate.

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