



## THE GOLDEN ORCHARD: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ECONOMIC BRILLIANCE OF SOPORE'S APPLE INDUSTRY IN KASHMIR

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### Abstract

The apple is one of the most significant horticultural products and is well-known for its health advantages all over the world. In northern India, Kashmir is one of the main apple-producing regions. The apple business in Kashmir, especially in the region of Sopore, is the Valley's main employer and the foundation of its economy. The fame of this fruit extends beyond the borders of the nation and into other countries. It is the sole source of income for many households and employs about 60% of the population overall. During the harvest season, tons of apples are sent to other states in India as well as to countries outside of India, and some are held here in cold storage. Although Kashmir produces several apple varieties, only seven are farmed on a commercial basis. The Mustafa Memorial Fruit Mandi, which is situated near Sopore in the district of Baramulla, is one of the main apple markets in the Valley of Kashmir.

**Keywords:** *Kashmir, Sopore, Fruit Mandi, Agro-Ecological*

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### Introduction

Apple cultivation is highly profitable economic activity in the state, which is famous for its quality apple. It is farm-based, labor intensive and commercially attractive economic activity. Fruit is Valley's mainstay industry that contributes to more than 8 percent of the UT's gross domestic production. The UT produces 17, 64,264 metric tonnes of fresh and 2, 70,104 metric tonnes of dry fruit. Around 3.31 lakh hectare of land is under the fruit cultivation in Jammu and Kashmir, of which around 1.67 lakh hectares is under apple cultivation. The UT produces around 15, 26,274 metric tonnes of apples per year. Around seven lakh farming families (approximately 35 lakh people) are directly or indirectly associated with the horticulture sector. Fruit contributes to around 8% of Jammu and Kashmir's gross domestic product. For temperate fruits and many kinds of crops, the land of Kashmir is heaven on earth. The Valley's climatic characteristics provide an ideal agro-ecological environment for the growth of a variety of fruits and products. Agriculture makes up a large portion of Sopore's economy. Due to the simple nature of the soil, apples are the easiest crop to grow among all horticultural goods, and they are also much more profitable than other crops. The region's economy and state are both supported by it. Apple's productivity and output have both significantly grown over the past few years. The British initially introduced the idea of apple farming to the nation in the Kullu Valley of

the Himalayan State of Himachal Pradesh. While the colorful "Delicious" apple varieties were first introduced to the Shimla highlands of the same state in 1917, the apple variety "Ambri" was cultivated in Kashmir for a very long time before it was introduced to the rest of the world. King Nara (1000 BC), King Lalitaditya (700 AD), and Harsha (1089 AD) all practiced fruit farming in the Kashmir valley. In the past 50 years, over 700 apple cultivars from the USA, Russia, the UK, Canada, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Australia, Switzerland, Italy, and Denmark have been tried and evaluated. The apple market is dominated by the tasty cultivars.

### **Origin of Fruit Mandi Sopore**

Before establishment of fruit mandi, the local growers sent their fruit boxes directly to the Azad pur mandi Delhi; it was the process which was hazardous for growers because of long distance as there were more chances of destroying the fruit boxes. With the establishment of fruit mandi sopore the growers now can sell their produce without any delay and it was felt that growers should get the benefit of their produce at their door steps. According to constitution of fruit mandi sopore, it is mentioned that after long twenty years of struggle by fruit growers and dealers' association, fruit mandi sopore was established in 13 August 1987. After this the locals sent their produce to the mandi where it was exported to rest of the country and other certain parts of world. Now whole process from buying to selling was conducted in this mandi. From 1987 the fruit mandi was governed by following governing bodies. President, Vice-president, General Secretary, Joint Secretary, Chairman Mandi office committee, Chairman trade committee, Chairman marketing committee, Chairman of Transport and Communication.

The fruit mandi Sopore is growing on extreme heights. The total number of sheds is 15. These sheds were distributed into wards called as phads, presently there are about 2000 phads where buying and selling took place. It is the Asia, s second largest fruit mundi as the position number first is occupied by Azadpur Mundi Delhi according to the president of mandi-Mr. Fayez Ahmad Malik (Kakaji). The land under the mandi constituted about 500 kanal, according to official record of fruit mandi. According the computer operator of fruit mandi Sopore, Ramiz Malik near about 4 crore boxes were dispatched in a year. Fruit Mandi Sopore, in a season provide job nearly about one lakh people.



**Front Gate of Fruit Mundi Sopore**

### **Apple Season in Sopore**

Sopore is a city in the baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir union territory. Sopore town was founded by Utpala engineer and irrigation minister Suyya during the reign of Avantiverman. It is the apple season, meaning the ripening and harvesting season for all apple varieties. The apple gardens in sopore attract a lot of tourists during apple season. The history of Apples is linked to the Silk Route and the origin of this fruit can be traced to Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty, which means Full of Apples. What makes Kashmir ideal for apples? Apples require cold winters with temperature at around 7<sup>0</sup>C and moderate summer temperatures ranging from 21-24<sup>0</sup>C with some humidity. It also requires elevation of 1500 to 2800 meters above mean sea level. The average summer temperature should be around 21-24<sup>0</sup>C during active growth period. Apple succeeds best in regions where the trees experience uninterrupted rest in winter and abundant sunshine for good color development. Well distributed rainfall of 1000-1250 mm throughout is most favorable for optimum growth. Considering these factors, Sopore becomes the most ideal location for apples and for this aspect Sopore is known as the Apple town of Kashmir and having the second largest Fruit Mandi in Asia. The beautiful landscape of Sopore is dotted with Apple orchards which change colour as per the season. Some orchards have dense population while others are sparse. The average number of plants in an area of one hectare can range between 200-1000. Sopore has about 25000 hectares under apple cultivation at an average yield of about 10.5 metric tons per hectare. In Sopore, mainly seven types of apples are grown – Ambri Kashmir, American Teral, Delicious, Maharaji, Piazzratbali, Kesari and Royal Misri. A few years ago, European varieties such as the M-9 and M-6 were also introduced to farmers in Sopore. The imported varieties fetch 17 tons per hectare while the traditional ones only produce 10.5-12 tons per hectare. The apples once harvested are packed in unique 4-5 layered cartons. The crates or cartons hold four or five layers of apples and between the layers of apples are grass and paper. The packaging is usually done by the farmers themselves with the help of labourers. The apples are then sent

to the Sopore Fruit Mandi where the farmers sell their stock. From the Fruit Mandi the apples are sent to various states across the country by means of trucks.

The growing apple production is creating more job opportunities for the locals. Apple growing is the mainstay of Sopore's economy by way of employment in farms, from planting to harvest, from packaging to transportation and from storage to distribution. In fact, apple farming has also created ancillary industries such as fruit preservation and packaging. The scope for the growth of apple industry in Sopore is vast if the youth is encouraged. With the government incentives to the population of Sopore promoting Apple plantation, there is no doubt we will see a more vibrant atmosphere in the days to come. Apple production will help the population of Sopore in being economically sound, and foster engagement in productive, conducive activities. This industry will also cater for improvement in the social fabric of Sopore and inculcate a sense of communal bonding through occupation. The proverb, an apple a day keeps the doctor away holds very true for the context that a prosperous harvest season will do wonders for the local population. Apple production being the main source of income for many at Sopore, should be widely promoted and encouraged locally, as this will provide a sense of positivity, normalcy and growth to the community.



**Apple Packing**

### **Pioneering of High-Density**

The growing of high-density apples has completely changed the landscape of apple production around the globe in general, and it is anticipated that this would also offer a boost to the apple sector in Jammu and Kashmir. After conventional apple cultivars were replaced with high-density apple cultivars, average production increased from 8.0 mt/ha to around 61.6 mt/ha. A high-density apple orchard is a new method for the development of apple fruit that has recently gained popularity. In this innovative method of farming, apple trees are systematically and densely planted or cultivated. Jeromine, Red Velox, Red Cap Valtod, Scarlet Spur-II, Super Chief, Gale Gala, Redlum Gala, Pink Lady, and Auvi Fuji are a few of the kinds being planted. The apple trees are planted in rows, with the first row



beings spaced 2 to 3 meters apart and the second row being spaced 3 to 5 meters apart. Traditional planting methods have a lengthy juvenile phase, require a lot of labour, and provide modest yields of fruits of poor quality. The best high-density apple cultivars' great production and high pricing have Kashmiri apple producers ecstatic. There is a good pace, optimism, and joy among apple growers in Kashmir as a result of observing the enormous yield in the high-density apple kinds. Additionally, the rates of these apples are twice as high as the rates of traditional Kashmiri apples.

High-density apple trees begin providing fruit in the second year after planting and achieve peak output in the fourth year. As a result of the unseasonably high snowfall in 2018 and 2019, hundreds of apple trees were uprooted in Kashmir, which made the timing of the introduction of these varieties perfect. Aside from that, high-density farms generate the largest proportion of A-grade fruits, which are superior in both quality and price. In comparison to traditional types, high-density yields are two to five times greater and use 70 to 80 percent less fertilizer and pesticides. The Department of Horticulture in J&K is assisting local farmers in the establishment of high-density apple orchards. Numerous brick kilns have been transformed into orchards. Currently, 7,000 kanals of land in Kashmir are being used to cultivate high-density apple varieties. High-density orchards have a lot of benefits, but there are also drawbacks that must be taken into account. The main drawback is the high expense of orchard establishment, which is also harsh in terms of management deficiencies. In comparison to conventional systems, high-density systems need more training and less pruning over the first six years. Given the high expenses of establishment, there is a very high likelihood that this sort of orchard will never be profitable if proper care is not taken in its early years.



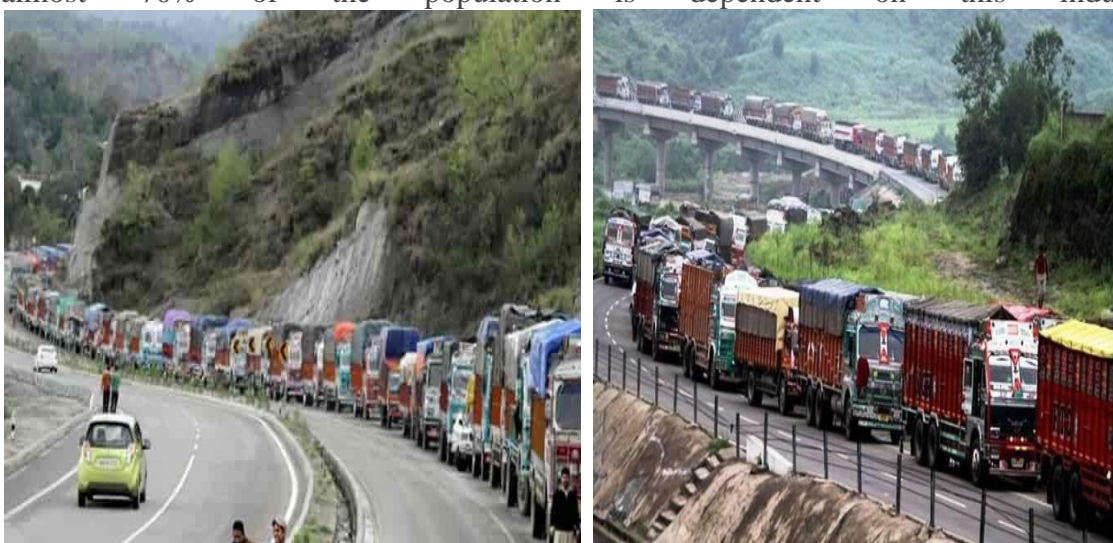
**View of High Density Orchard Plants**

### **Scenario of Fruit Mundi from Last one Decade**

The Sopore fruit mandi comes abuzz with thousands of people from June to December, and this time of the year witnesses a business of over 2000 cores through auctions. Sellers reach the market in the early morning and by evening; most apples are sold to buyers across India and even abroad. In 2019, after the revocation of the special status of J&K, the apple market in Sopore suffered major losses. Usually, 250-300 fruit trucks would leave the market daily and at peak season to 500-600 trucks per day during October and

November. However, post-2019, the apple business in Sopore saw a decline. The fruit mandi was shut, traders from other states started returning to their native places as the apples were low-priced, and local fruit sellers and orchardists suffered due to internet and communication shut down in addition to reduced sales of apples.

In 2022 the same situation raised because of Halting of fruit-laden trucks on Srinagar-Jammu national highway has taken a heavy toll on Asia's second largest fruit mandi in Sopore, with the mandi administration saying they have suffered Rs 500 crore losses in the month of September only. Revealing the tentative loss assessment, President of the traders' association at Fruit Mandi Sopore, Mudasir Ahmed Bhat, said that a trader suffers a loss of Rs 4-5 lakh per truck due to the authorities unnecessarily stopping trucks on the highway. "If the situation doesn't change, we will go for a hunger strike." Similarly, President Fruit Mandi Sopore, Fayaz Ahmed Malik, said that the fruit industry has already suffered heavy losses during the last several years and the government must at least ensure hassle-free movement of fruit trucks, so that the produce reaches markets on time and fetches a good rate. Malik said that he is hopeful that the matter will be taken seriously after a meeting with the chief secretary, after which directions were passed by the government to allow movement of fruit-laden trucks. He also said that by not allowing the fruit trucks towards Jammu, it seems the administration wants to crush the fruit industry. He said that the fruit industry is the backbone of Jammu and Kashmir's economy and almost 70% of the population is dependent on this industry.



**Fruit Laden Trucks on Jammu & Kashmir National Highway**  
**Conclusion**

Apple cultivation contributes to about 55% of the horticulture area of sopore. The study has pursued primary as well as secondary data to accomplish its specific objectives. In sopore town, the economic condition is changing rapidly along with Jammu and Kashmir through horticulture sector. It plays an important role in improving the standard of living of the Kashmir as a whole and sopore in particular. The relative peace in the town has made it



possible for farmers to focus on improving their livelihood. The apples fruits of the Kashmir are almost dispatched to all national fruit markets and also to some international markets like Bangladesh and Nepal.

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