Agriculture is the most important activity of the people of Kashmir. Around 80% people in this Union territory located in the North western Himalayan mountain range are cultivators in one form or the other and they essentially follow a traditional family farming system. The initial land-use pattern in the state was purely agricultural, but now it has changed over a period of time to Agri-horticultural to Silvo-pastoral process. Although the net area sown has remained more or less same - 7.35 lakh hectares, the area under fruit and vegetable cultivation has marginally increased to 228 thousand hectares.

For centuries, Kashmir is famous for its traditional heritage of saffron and remains its largest producer in the Indian subcontinent. Agricultural practices for saffron in Kashmir began in 500 BC. Four districts of Jammu and Kashmir – Pulwama, Budgam, Srinagar and Kishtwar – grow saffron. One of the legacies of saffron farming practice for centuries in and around the Pampore Karewas of Kashmir in India is that this ancient farming system continues to inspire family farmers and local communities through their livelihood security that it provides for more than 17,000 farm families. Pampore has earned the title of Kashmir’s “saffron town” for growing the best quality saffron. The Kashmiri village women contribute to this agriculture heritage site through traditional tilling to flower picking over 3,200 hectares dedicated to the legendary saffron crop cultivation at Pampore.

Owing to its cultural and traditional importance, the Saffron Heritage site was designated as a Globally Important Agriculturally Heritage System (GIAHS) in 2011 [1].

**BIOGEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Saffron is a cash crop and cultivated primarily in the Pampore district of the Kashmir valley, where about 3000 acres of land is under saffron cultivation. The site is situated on the banks of river Vatista, it is located at 34°01'N and 74°56'E with an average elevation of 1,574 metres, about 25 km south-east of Kashmir’s capital Srinagar. Balhama, Zewan, Kakaore, Samopra are some prominent saffron villages of Pampore.
The saffron site has a temperate type of climate with annual precipitation ranging from 800-900 mm. The mean monthly temperature of the saffron heritage site ranges from -3 to 29 degree Celsius.

The soil is alluvial and lacustrine. For the cultivation of the Pampore Karewa soil are specially made as square beds, where each bed measures 1.5m and is provided with a narrow trench on all sides to prevent the accumulation of water.

**GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

The land is owned and managed by the individual farmers and governed by the ‘All J&K Saffron Growers Development Marketing Cooperative Association’ constituted by the farmers. Almost 9,000 families are stewards of this traditional crop in the heritage site. The land is further protected by the Revenue department which ensures that no land-use change shall take place in the area.

**TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES**

Saffron (Crocus sativus) is a perennial, herbaceous plant. In Kashmir, it is traditionally cultivated in the month of September. The saffron corms are planted after ploughing by hand, dropping as a mixture of grades under the traditional system for longer economic benefits. Before planting the new set of corms, the saffron soils are well pulverized 13-14 times between April to September. In the existing fields soil is hoed twice a year in the months of June and September to facilitate aeration to the corms and allowing corm sprouts to emerge out of soil. During the vegetative phase from November to May, the saffron fields are attended to control rodents. Dry foliage is also harvested in May as fodder for livestock. In October, with the onset of autumn, the Pampore Karewa plateau turns purple with saffron flowers.

Hundreds of Kashmiri women with baskets on their backs, plucking blossoms and singing folk songs is a sight to behold. They are an irreplaceable part of the saffron story and play an integral role right from tilling the soil, to picking and gently drying the flowers. It is considered no less than an art that is perfectly executed by these women with patience and tenderness. After the flowers are dried, tossed, and sorted, they are handed over to the men folk. The insides of the flowers are stripped away and the saffron is graded, this is now ready to be packed in moisture-proof containers. To maintain high quality of Kashmir saffron, picking is advocated within 2 days of flower opening with stigma separation within 10 hours followed by drying in scientific solar/hot air dryers.

Although the planting system followed by the saffron growers has been of low productivity, improved technologies, like application of a combination of N:P:K @90:60:50 kg/ha with vermicompost @5 q/ha, have been effective in rejuvenating the fields.
Saffron (*Crocus sativus*) is a traditional, rare and endangered cash crop that is grown in this agricultural heritage system. Efforts from the younger generation to appreciate and conserve heritage play an integral role in safeguarding the traditional agriculture system.

Intercropping and agro-pastoralism in the agricultural system have resulted in high cultivated biodiversity of crops such as rice, maize, millet, lentils, wheat, barley, almonds, apples, cherries, rapeseed, mustard, linseed, sesame, toria, and cottonseed. Further, the farmers do not use chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Instead, sheep and goats are bred within this agricultural system providing a source of manure for the soils [2].

This ancient farming system continues to inspire family farmers and local communities through their livelihood security that it provides for more than 17,000 farm families. It provides livelihood opportunities and security to Kashmiri women, as large numbers of women are traditionally been working in the saffron sites.

The Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System programme suggests innovative scientific and technical approaches that are adopted for dynamically adapting to changing environment with due awareness-raising.

**CONTACT INFORMATION -**

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