

Preliminary Draft Version

## **Peasant Land Rights Movements of Pakistan**

Ahmad Salim

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This publication is meant to document together the various forms of information available on peasant movements which have occurred in the geographical terrain now called Pakistan. Since no such prior work as such exists, it draws on various sources, including informal knowledge systems. Due to the paucity of available material, it is hoped that this compilation would bring together diverse information, as a suggested starting point for future researchers, hence, this write-up has not been put through the grind of rigorous academic referencing. It is also written from the author's personal standpoint that understands the colonial encounter as a project of exploitation, of subjugation and resource-transfer for the benefit of the imperial power. All peasant initiatives that challenged this power locus have therefore been read as initiatives for change.

**Disclaimer:** Please note that this is a preliminary draft and has not yet been approved by the English Editorial Board of SDPI. The work relies heavily upon existing disparate sources that have not been properly referenced. This is not meant to be a research paper or an academic pursuit of the author; the purpose of this preliminary draft is the compilation of reference material to educate people about the available literature on this topic.

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# Peasant Land Rights Movements of Pakistan

Ahmad Salim

## 1. Pre-colonial Pakistan

### 1.1. Mughal Era

In the early *Mughal* period the State claimed a share of the produce of the land from the cultivator. The laws of Manu mention one-sixth of the gross produce as the legitimate share of the King. During the war and other emergencies, it was increased to one-fourth. Then, during the period of *Emperor Akbar*, a famous settlement was made, fixing the revenue on the land. For this reason he also developed a very comprehensive plan and system of examination to assess the taxable capacity of different lands. Land was carefully measured and divided into four classes, representing different grades of fertility. The Government's share was fixed as one-third of the gross produce. Thus, the *Mughals* did not introduce any fundamental changes in the ancient revenue system, but put a coherent system in place.

In the later *Mughal* era, the control over the revenue of the land weakened, and the flow of income started declining. Consequently, a system called 'revenue farming' was introduced in Bengal in the reign of Farukhsiyer (1713-19). Under this system, the revenue farmer paid the Government nine-tenth of the whole collection and kept the rest as his collection charges. However, in the later period, the right of collecting land revenue for a *pargana* (district) was sold by public auction to the highest bidders. Due to this, the exploitation of the cultivators started, and the revenue farmers became more dominant. This revenue farming system, which started during the *Mughal* rule in Bengal, was soon extended to other parts of the country - this was the beginning of the era of *Jagirdars* and landlords.

Collective farming and accruing benefit from crops has remained a critical phenomenon of South Asian peasant history. The concept of private ownership brought an end to the idea of joint benefits for society. It also created mass resistance and, consequently, a series of peasant revolts starting in the medieval period in the sub-continent, particularly in the areas comprising present-day Pakistan.

The *Mughal* period had to suffer such rebellions in the land of Pashtuns, Punjab and Sindh. It is interesting to note that Pashtuns and Sindhi movements were led by Sufi Saints like *Bayazid Ansari* (Pashtun), and *Sufi Shah Inayat Shaheed* (Sindhi), while *Madhu Lal Hussain* of Lahore was behind the peasant revolt led by *Farid* and his son *Dulla Bhatti* in central Punjab.

### 1.2. The Resistance of Pashtun Peasants under the Roshaniah Movement

Bayazid Ansari (born in 1525 at Jullundur in Punjab of parents who hailed from the Mahsud area of Waziristan) founded the Roshaniah sect, and was called '*Pir-i-Rokhan*' by

his followers and *'Pir-i-Tareek'* by his opponents. Pir Rokhan revolted against Mughal rule, and through his mobilization of the people is credited with the creation of a Pukhtun national identity, along with heralding a new era of literary expression. His political vision provided a manifesto for upcoming generations and, after his death, his son Jalala continued his struggle against the Mughals and landlords.

Zaman Taizi chronicles an event that led the Pir Rokhan to launch his resistance – when he saw Mughals punishing a woman for something by forcibly tying her up. He began his opposition to the rulers and also adopted a mysticism that resonated with the Pakhtun way of thinking, which caused ripples within the reign<sup>1</sup>.

Another important aspect of the *Roshaniah* movement was the vision of Bayazid Ansari concerning collective farming. During his time he preached the concept of community ownership among his disciples and the general masses, and propagated open opposition to Pukhtun nobles, whom he claimed divided people along feudal lines.

*“He combined the desire for freedom from Mughal rule with the peasant dream of equality, of an essentially anti-feudal nature”; furthermore, “He preached a kind of social communism and allowed his followers to seize the lands and property of those who did not agree with his faith.”*<sup>2</sup>

From Hashtnagar, Ansari started his movement by proclaiming rebellion against the Mughal rulers. Different tribes joined him in his struggle against the Mughals and their perceived unjust policies regarding land rights. His ideas of collective farming were based on the belief that there is no just concept of landlords or ownership of private property and that the land belongs to Allah and, since God created people as equals, the benefits of lands should also be on equitable terms.

After Ansari and his son Jalala's death, Ansari's grandson, Ihad, and his wife Bibi Alai, took charge of the movement that included both massive agitations and even armed struggle. After an epic battle against Emperor Shah Jehan in which almost all men in the villages were killed (including Ihad), Bibi Alai moved to Tirah valley, from where she launched her struggle. Her exploits were the inspiration for many folk stories and songs. Some time later, her rebellion was also crushed, but she did not surrender and died fighting.

### **1.3. Peasants Revolts in Punjab**

#### **1.3.1. Punjabi Peasants & Resistance: Dulla Bhatti**

Dulla Bhatti's whole-hearted struggle for the welfare of peasants of Punjab has a significant role in the history of Punjab. He and his companions waged a guerilla war against the Mughal Empire. He was born into the warrior family of Pindi Bhattian, and was

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1 (Conceived from Dr Sher Zaman Taizi's Article on Pir Rokhan: Bayazid Ansari)

2 Quoted from Ahmad Salim, *“The Way of Heaven”*, *The Frontier Post*, Lahore, 27. 11. 1992.

the son of Farid Khan. Mr. Fateh Mohammad, in his book ‘Punjabi Identity’, explains this historical figure as;

*“Dulla Bhatti, a rebel against the Emperor Akbar (1554-1605) is a historical figure, who, walking on the footprints of his father Farid Bhatti and his grandfather Bijli Bhatti, waged guerrilla warfare against the Mughal Empire. He was executed, like his father and grandfather by the imperial authorities. So fierce was the spirit of the resistance that Akbar had to shift the Imperial capital to Lahore for more than twenty years. But the struggle of all the three generations of rebels against the Mughal domination in Punjab is shrouded in mist. History is silent on them but the folk-Vars are rich of the details about their heroic exploits.”<sup>3</sup>*

Farmers refused to pay any taxes or even admit Akbar as their ruler. In response, the landlords and governors used violent means to collect the land revenue. Mughal Emperor Akbar ordered his governors and tax collectors to adopt aggressive measures, such as forced evictions. This reaction resulted in duly aggressive revolts and enraged fighting between the peasants and local governors. The result was a series of scuffles and clashes between the Mughal army and peasants throughout the province, leading to numerous cases of injury, as well as the looting of royal caravans by the peasants.

Against this backdrop, Dulla Bhatti took over the mantle of leadership and stood against Akbar for 10 years. The peasants were asked not to pay tax or revenue. When Akbar came to Lahore, he ordered the execution of the rebels. Dulla’s father and his grandfather were both killed. To instill fear into the hearts of the common man, Akbar had their skins stuffed with wheat-hay and hung the corpses on the main door. But Dulla’s rebellion was not only aimed at the change of government; he also wielded his efforts for the bringing of change in the socio-economic system. The great Sufi poet Shah Hussain, who was also the closest comrade of Dulla Bhatti, has described the significant achievements of this movement in his stories and became his voice in his efforts.

With the death of Dulla Bhatti, the revolutionary movement prolonged for decades, showing strong resistance to the Mughal emperors and their allies. But after so many years of stiff confrontation and bloodshed, this movement was finally defeated. The contribution of Dulla Bhatti’s kin-folk in the history of Punjab is full of tales of heroism. His mother, Mail Laddhi, is one of the most prominent figures in the fight against the Mughals. She stood against the landlord’s and the Mughal’s attack on Pindi Bhattian village when Dulla Bhatti and his companions were not present. Dulla’s mother and other women of the village fought courageously against the Mughals.

#### **1.4. Sindh through Sufferings**

Sindh experienced Hindu imperialism, Arab dominance, Turkish monarchy, Afghan rule, and the hegemony of Mughal India. The lot of peasants and tillers in Sindh was among the worst in the region. There was no protection against the forced slavery that had spread over

3 (Fateh Mohammad Malik in , “ Punjabi Identity”, sung-e-meel publications: Lahore, 1989)

centuries. In the time of Emperor Aurangzaib Alamgir, the Mughal dynasty was already in decline, and Sindh faced the brunt of the ensuing chaos by the time of ShahJehan. Bhaek points out:

*“The fundamental foundation of Mughal period was declining [and] was in state of turmoil. Violence, rebellion and looting erupted throughout the country. The situation was further exploited by the illicit and self-centered dominance by the Jagirdars and Nawabs. The Mughal emperor lost his control over these Jagirdars and Landlord. Situation in Sindh and its rural areas was terrifying, when Aurgangzeb’s army after loosing control over upper Sindh handed over to Mian Yar Mohammad Kalhora. And then during the Emperor Jahangir reign most of the areas of Sindh came under the direct control of Kalhora’s.”<sup>4</sup>*

Bhaek notes that land in Sindh was divided into four administrative categories: Khalsa, Jagirat, Inaami (honorary/rewarded) and Zamindari (agrarian land). The Khalsa was considered the sole property of the king or the ruler. In the Islamic system of state the Jagirdari (land ownership) system was first introduced by the Umayyad dynasties, when Khalifas gifted enormous lands to their relatives.

#### **1.4.1. Mehdavi Movement**

The *Mehdavi* movement, emphasizing the Oneness of God, justice, dignity and awareness of the rights of people, began a new era in the history of Sindh. Founded by Miran Syed Mohammad Jodpuri (1443 – 1505), it amassed its base in Thatta, where he was stationed for over two years. Bhaek elaborates:

*“The Mehdavi movement was based on the soviet system, its founder Sayyed Mohammad Jonpuri; He was a well-literate, visionary and man of character. His organization was also known as ‘Daira’, of whom people from each segment of society, whether poor or rich were members. His movement was based on the principle of universal equality, where everyone has had the right for better living without any discrimination.”<sup>5</sup>*

One of the Indian subcontinent’s most famous historians, scholars, and prose writers, Molana Abu-ul-Kalam Azad, in his book ‘Tazkara’, gives details about the workers of the Mehdavi Dairas or communes as follows;

*“They used to live in the desolate place of the city; they had no importance for material things, relations, and other worldly things. After the entire day work the one tenth of the total income was spent in the way of God. The rest of the earning was to be shared with their brothers and their families. They*

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4 (Conceived from Mian Abudl Ghani Bhaek’s “Struggle and Experience of Collective Farming in the Land of Sindh)

5 (Conceived from Mian Abudl Ghani Bhaek’s “Struggle and Experience of Collective Farming in the Land of Sindh)

*were the true believers of equal share in everything they earned. Beside this they were also role model of peace, tolerance and truthfulness.”*

The historical record provides evidence of the principles of the Mehdavi movement being actualized through collective livelihood and joint farming, based on Islamic teachings critical to the Mehdavi movement.

#### **1.4.2. Shah Inayat of Jhok**

Almost 100 years before the French Revolution, Sufi Shah Inayat endeavored to demolish the authority of autocrats and feudal lords in Sindh, and in doing so he invited their enmity. It was in the 17th century that Shah Inayat virtually single-handedly attempted to transfer feudal society into an agrarian egalitarian society where the collective well-being of all was to become a reality. He thus declared that *‘Land belongs to God and its yield to the tiller’*.

In his scholarly work on Sindh, Amar Jaleel describes the revolutionary Sufi Shah Inayat;

*Ali Sher Kanea has recorded in Tuhfat-ul-Kiram, that the poor and the wretched people had become weary and tired of the ruthless rule of Indian bureaucrats. They therefore, took refuge in the abode of Soofi Shah Inayat. Nawab Azam Khan (the administrative authority on Sindh at the time) was not an exception. He was readily persuaded by the enemies of Soofi Shah Inayat, and he promptly declared the saintly Soofi a traitor, and charged him with treason. He took sanction from the Center to crush the Saint this sanction was immediately granted, because it suited the mood of the autocrats. Nawab Azam Khan then called upon Mian Yar Mohammad, and other local depots and feudal lords to send their armies and mercenaries to him, to enable him to wage a war against Soofi Shah Inayat”<sup>6</sup>*

Hazrat Shah Inayat was a Sufi of the Saharwardy order. It is thought that his elders migrated from Baghdad and settled in Uch. His family was followers of the Saharwardia Makhdooms of Uch and his father came to Sindh as their representative.

Shah Inayat was born in 1655-56. He received his education in Tasawuff by another renowned Sufi of Multan, Shams Shah. He sent Shah Inayat to Hyderabad in Deccan to acquire further knowledge from Mubarak Shah Abdul Malik. From there he came to Meeran Pur, also known as Jhok Sharif. Within a short time of his stay in Jhok Sharif, he became popular as an ascetic Sufi among the masses. His popularity peaked when he distributed his family’s land and the land granted by the rulers to Dargah, amongst the landless peasants without any compensation or share in the yield. This move greatly disturbed the neighboring landlords, the Sayyads. They immediately considered him a social threat and, with the connivance of the Mughal governor of Thatta, Mir Lutuf Ali, they attacked Jhok Sharif, killing many of Shah Inayat’s followers.

6 Ahmad Salim, “The Sufi Revolution”, *Frontier Post*, 13, November 1992

Shah Inayat, being an apostle of the Mehdavi movement, organized his struggle in a very touching manner. He also introduced some new guiding principles for the Mehdavi Dairas. During this time, the responsibilities of the head of the movement and Dairas were increased with regards to the collective farming and consumption livelihood that included even the protection of the social life of the common man in society. Progressively, this Dairas system became sanctuary for the poor and maltreated peasants and workers. These Dairas were usually established in the outskirts of a city and were built on the foundation of unity and collective consumption, where every individual in society had equal rights for living and growth.

Some historical records on the Mehdavi movement reveal its structure and system. In some important literature on the Mehdavi movement, one can understand the terms and different provisions introduced by the Mehdavi *Dairas*, such as:

'*Soviet*'; according to this, in every *Daira* there was a proper share allocated for the offspring. '*Nan Raiza*' was usually distributed among those affected by disaster or in times of emergency. '*Nobats*' were responsible for taking care of every Dairas, and were in charge for providing water, fuel and preaching. In case of discussion and mutual advice, people used to congregate in an assembly, which was known as '*Ijmaa*'. Beside this, there was a proper institutional setup established to teach and preach the teachings of the religion and other aspects of life. A proper rule of law and judicial system was established which was known as '*Had*'.

Shah Inayat brought this to the knowledge of the Mughal King Forukh Sare at Delhi. The King ordered that all the lands of the Sayyads be handed over to Shah Inayat as compensation. The King also granted more land for the expenses and maintenance of his dargah. This land was also distributed among the peasants. Shah Inayat was now a challenge to the settled and static social order, in which there was no place for ambition. The result was that the system retaliated with full force and pounced upon him; all the custodians of the status quo united.

The neighboring landlords sent a fabricated message to the King that Shah Inayat was organizing a revolt against him in the guise of a spiritual movement. The King ordered his governor to deal with the insurgency of Shah Inayat swiftly and immediately. Hence the governor of Thatta, the Kalhora ruler, Pirs, the Sayyads, and other landlords mustered their forces and besieged the fort of Jhok. The devotees of Shah Inayat refused to surrender. It might have been easy for the government forces to smash through the mud walls of the fort but it was very difficult to topple the wall of determination of the devotees. They started a guerrilla war against the government forces and inflicted heavy losses upon them.

The siege continued for six months. Seeing the losses of government forces and the resilience of the devotees, the governor decided to capture Shah Inayat by treachery. He sent a Holy Quran to Shah Inayat and invited him for dialogue according to its tenets. Shah Inayat knew that it was a trap of treachery and deceit, but to honor the Holy Quran he decided to surrender. He instructed all his devotees not to take up arms, whatever may happen, because the matter was now with Allah. The Governor, after receiving Shah

Inayat, ordered his immediate arrest and execution by beheading. When he was being beheaded he gave blessings to the executioner. Shah Inayat attained martyrdom in January 1718. His struggle against the feudal lords was the first determined uprising against feudalism in India.

## 2. British Era - Historical Perspective: British India

### 2.1. Agrarian Overview

Administrative control of the sub-continent after the fall of the Mughal Empire lay with the British colonial empire. The colonial power spread their control by creating cohorts of indigenous feudal princes and chieftains loyal to the British Crown. After the 1850s, radical reforms were introduced, such as the British Land Settlement, formalized revenue systems and other legislation, along with devising systems to increase the grip of the local elite on the peasants, and became intolerant of the slightest forms of resistance.

*“With annexation of Ranjit Singh’s Punjab in 1848-49 the whole of India lay under the jack-boot of British imperialism. By this time, Industrial Revolution had long since taken place in Britain and industrial capital had come to occupy the dominant position. The British industrialists were in search of market to sell their manufactured goods and to buy material cheap for their industries. Therefore, they have developed Punjab as an ideal colonial market. It is with this motive that canal irrigation was developed and ten million acres of waste-lands were colonized and arid lands were converted into blooming fields of wheat, cotton and oil seeds.”<sup>7</sup>*

*“The foreign government introduced a complicated legal system on the British pattern, proliferating litigation which proved highly costly and ruinous. The autonomous village, (panchayats) were uprooted. Fresh land settlements were carried out to determine land revenue in cash instead of in kind and land tenures based on the concept of private property in land on the English Pattern, allowing sales and mortgages of lands to the money-lenders. Colonial exploitation led to indebtedness of peasantry and their growing expropriation.”<sup>8</sup>*

Mr. L. Natarajan, in his book Peasant Uprising in India, states;

*“New Classes were making their appearance on the Indian arena: zamindars and moneylender-landlords on the one hand, and the masses of the dispossessed peasantry and ruined artisans forced to work as tenants-at-will, sharecroppers and landless labourers on the other. All these changes had radically altered the character and the needs of a sustained popular struggle against people’s oppressors. The Rebellion of 1857 received a wide popular support in a number of regions of India. However, the needs of the changed conditions in the country had relegated to the dustbins of history the usefulness of the worn-out leaders, outmoded objective and blunted weapons of the Rebellion. New demands and slogans, reflecting people’s needs had to arise.”<sup>9</sup>*

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7 (Quoted from, *Agrarian Scene in British Punjab*, Vol. 1. The People Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983)

8 (Quoted from, *Agrarian Scene in British Punjab*, Vol. 1. The People Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983)

9 (Quoted from L. Natarajan, “Peasant Uprising in India (1850-1900)” people publishing house:

According to L. Natarajan, a new kind of people's struggle was borne in 1855 with the march of fifty thousand Santhal peasant warriors, and lasted until the completely successful general strike of 1860 in Bengal.

## **2.2. The Provincial Scenario**

Because of its indirect rule and distance from the masses, colonial rule was hardly visible and perceived to be exploitative by the bulk of the peasantry. Consequently peasants' politics was mostly about how to circumscribe the power and authority of the zamindar, bhadralok, and mahajan triumvirate during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, during the first 100-odd years of the British Raj, up to the 1870s, the British colonial masters had been the main adversaries from the viewpoint of most peasants. This was so because of the Government's promotion and protection of the zamindari and indigo plantation interests, which directly and adversely affected the peasant interests. This consequently resulted in mass agitation, making ground for leaders to succeed in mobilizing peasant support in political movements in the name of their land rights.

The Sirajganj and PABNA Peasant Uprising of 1872-73, led by both Hindu and Muslim leaders and participated in by both Hindu and Muslim peasants, was against the arbitrary enhancement of rent by local zamindars. Under the leadership of local leaders, the rebellion was violent, short-lived, localized, sporadic, and 'pre-political' by nature; the movement did not aim at abolishing the zamindari system, but wanted 'just rent' from the zamindars, who were very much legitimate in their eyes, from the parameters of their 'moral economy'. This uprising later led to the enactment of the Bengal Tenancy ACT of 1885 and eventually to the creation of the Muslim League in 1906 and the Indian National Congress, as the government wanted non-violent constitutional movements as alternatives to the violent ones in order to promote better rights for the peasants to pacify them.

Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani (1880-1976) was among the many leaders who emerged through this process. He was a Muslim leader who used non-violent, mass civil disobedience techniques to promote nationalism in Assam, Bengal, and Bangladesh in the north-eastern part of the Indian sub-continent. He was initially at the forefront of the peasant rights movement in Tangail against the oppressive landlords. Following a peasant uprising against the King of Santosh in which Bhashani played the leading role, he was expelled by the British from the Mymensing district, which included Tangail. Uprooted but undiscouraged, Bhashani continued to organize peasant movements in northern Bengal alongside his workers.

The land struggle in Punjab during the British period was aimed at reform, not revolutionary overthrow. The peasantry of Punjab was at that time threatened by money-lenders, who were mainly Hindus. In this connection, government responded by introducing the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, which prevented the acquisition of agrarian land by people and groups whose livelihood was not connected to land.

*“In The Punjab, the various Government measures such as the Land Colonization Act, 1900, the Land Alienation Act, 1901, the Transfer of Property Act, 1904, and the Punjab Pre-emption Act, 1905, provoked complex reactions from the political leaders. To some, it seemed to be a severe blow to the national unity and solidarity and an attempt to win over the favor of the Muslim zamindars at the cost of the Hindu Bania....This Act adversely affected quite a large section of the society, especially the Hindu and Sikh peasantry.”<sup>10</sup>*

Slogans of people’s basic needs were raised, and this resistance turned into violent struggle as poor peasants developed an organized struggle, focusing on the trinity of the zamindars, the money-lenders and the alien government<sup>11</sup>.

*“The revolutionary group under the leadership of Ajit Singh, Sufi Amba Prasad and Agha Haider geared up against the oppressive policies of the government. The repressive policy of the Government that followed the agitation in the Punjab in 1907, gave rise to the revolutionary activities in the whole province”.<sup>12</sup>*

In Sindh, the British introduced a land revenue system instead of collecting ‘chouth,’ and empowered the Zamindars through the *Ryotwari* system. Under the patronage of colonial rule, the Jagirdars and Zamindars began to change the share of Haris under Batai (share-cropping). But as their holdings increased and problems became more acute, they found it increasingly difficult to manage their lands on their own. So they introduced a new system of contracts, known as ‘Makota,’ by which they gave their lands to the ‘Maktadar’ (contractors). The result was disastrous for the tillers, as contractors charged them the money they had to pay to the zamindars, plus land revenue and the profit-share of the new masters.

In Balochistan, lack of agrarian land, unexplored minerals with no significant industrial setup, and dismal agricultural production were and remain the major problems of the community. The stagnation of Balochistan’s agriculture and land reforms has been the direct consequence of a very particular pattern of land appropriation and utilization. The *Jagirdari* system, used in the Kalat state, wins and maintains the loyalty of the tribes by rewarding the sardars. The other category of land was ‘*Mehmani Land*’, land transferred from British administration to the Sardars. They in turn leased out the lands to tribes on fixed lease amounts. This was the only land the Sardar could claim as his personal property, and in all other cases the Sardar’s role is just like a revenue officer, who often gets to keep part or all of the revenues of his area in lieu of services rendered.

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10 (Quoted from Ganda Singh’s “The Punjab Past and Present”, Vol. XX Serial No. 9, Department of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University Patiala, 1986)

11 L. Natarajan, “Peasant Uprising in India (1850 – 1900)”, People Publishing House, Bombay, 1953

12 Ganda Singh’s “The Punjab Past and Present”, Vol. XX Serial No. 9, Department of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University Patiala, 1986)

This overview, however, does not reflect the bureaucratic fraud, asymmetric taxation systems, and the unjustified share of the cultivators and illegal expulsion of peasants from their land. All this led to a coordinated peasant struggle, despite the lack of a political philosophy or an organization to assure continuity of their resistance.

### 2.3. Organization of the Peasantry

The All-India Peasant's Committee came into existence in October 1935; prior to which no political party had taken steps for the betterment of farmers. Initially peasants unions were formed in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra, Malabar, Gujrat, Punjab and Bengal. N.G Ranga of Andhra Pradesh was one of the prominent names among its founders of peasant organizations in India. Then, in 1936, All- India Kisan Sabha, with its significantly red flag, was founded and within 3 years of its inception it has managed to raise its membership to 800,000 peasants. Their slogan was "*Kisan Mazdoor Raj*<sup>13</sup>".

#### 2.3.1. Sindh Hari Committees

'*Land to the tiller*' and '*total abolition of landlordism*' have always been the basic slogans of the poor Hari community of Sindh since its inception. The seizure and distribution of the land of the landlords still remains the central rallying point propagated amongst the peasantry and other democratic classes. Without the victory of this slogan, they posited, there cannot be any solution to rural poverty, unemployment, and the miserable living condition of the Haris of Sindh. The role of Sindh Haris in raising their voices for their basic agrarian rights, ownership of land and agitation against the oppression they faced is very significant. The brutalities of the landlords and the sub-human condition of the Haris in Sindh took a new shape when these deprived people of Sindh decided to combine their efforts for joint struggle against their masters by forming the Sindh Hari Committee.

The main objective behind the formation of the *Hari Committee* was to instill a coordinated effort to counter the exploitation of the Hari community of Sindh Province, and for those exploited, oppressed and subjected to unreasonable exaction to be provided with a platform for joint action against the *Jagirdar's* and *zamindars*. Before the British occupation of the land of Sindh province, during the reign of Kaloras, Sardars and Mirs, the condition of Hari community was as miserable as during the British period. They used to forcefully collect huge percentages of the total produce, called "Chouth", while the uncultivated land had no value.

The un-challenged authority of the zamindars does not end here; they began to increase the collection of their share in the crop from the poor farmers and illegally expelled Haris from their lands. To challenge these policies, the Sindh Hari Committee worked wholeheartedly. As a representative of peasants on different individual and collective matters which placed their problems before the government officials, Sindh Hari Committee became very influential and carried enough weight to challenge the bureaucracy and the zamindars.

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13 Dr. Panchanan Saha, "The Russian Revolution and the Indian Patriots", Manisha publication, New Delhi, 1987

The Sindh Hari movement was led by very famous political leaders and social workers. The name of Hyder Baksh Jatoi is worth mentioning here. Jatoi was a very prominent political icon of Sindh; he was a member of Indian National Congress, the Theosophical Society and the communist party of India. He has also served as deputy collector, but he left the job to serve his people and became the president of Sindh Hari Committee. He was a true believer in the freedom and rights of peasants and poor segments of Sindhi society. He opposed the capitalist class of the British period, in which the zamindars enjoyed the luxurious life.

One important effort initiated by the Sindh Hari committee was challenging the Tenancy legislation proposed by the Sir Roger Thomas. The legislation was seen by many as created to exploit the rights of the peasants of Sindh, which was aggressively taken by the Sindh Hari committee by standing firmly against this reform. The Sindh Hari committee had a firm belief in democratic values, and the organization of the committee was built on democratic values; all the issues were resolved and discussed in the general body of the executive council. The Sindh Hari committee was very organized; it had establishments at different talukas and districts all across the province. Their processions against the British imperials and zamindars were also very organized. They have also organized many conferences on the problems of the Hari community of Sindh; the Sindh Hari committee also got the Sindh Tenancy Act passed, one of their chief achievements.

### **2.3.2. Punjab Kisan Committees**

Similar to other peasant organizations of the country, the entire history of the Punjab peasant movement bore witness itself to long and severe repression against its organisation and workers. After the British succeeded in suppressing the uprising, they had to learn a lesson and change their tactics. The East India Company was liquidated and India became a colony of the British government. They also made a lot of concessions to the feudal lords, thereby winning their sympathy and support. In spite of all this, the uprisings left their imprint on the national liberation struggle, which developed in subsequent years, accompanied by a period of intensified exploitation of the country. This exploitation of the peasants of Punjab helped the British to promote the development of commodity-money relations in both towns and villages, further penetrating their use of trading and usury capital into the spheres of agriculture and handicrafts.

Punjab peasants, after long sufferings and exploitation, decided to create a platform to raise their voice and work for the common agenda; in 1937 the Punjab Kisan Committee (PKC) was formed. It was also associated with the All India Kisan committee<sup>14</sup>.

Its first annual conference was organized by the Loyalpur peasant workers of the PKC in October 1937, under the presidency of Mr. Sajjad Zaheer. The main charter decided in the meeting was to intensify agitation for the cancellation of debts, assessing the land revenue on income-tax basis and exemption of unjustified and un-economic holdings from taxation. They also demanded that only actual tillers of the land (and not the big landlords) should

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<sup>14</sup> According to another source PKC was established in 1936 and was known as ten as Punjab Kisan Sabha, *Sada yug* (Punjab Weekly) December, 21 1975, p. 42

be owners of the land. This conference was very significant and fruitful; about 6 resolutions were passed in the meeting, in which peasant workers from about 15 districts were present.

The Kisan Committee from its creation became very active in their respective districts. On the other hand, PKC also faced a very strong resistance and were drawn from the various districts and villages by the authorities. PKC leadership was very influential in increasing the strength of the movement. They used to travel district to district and village to village amongst fellow peasants.

Until partition, the PKC was very active and had a comparatively strong mass base (viewed from a national perspective), inevitability ranking either 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> among all provinces in total membership figures until partition. The peasant movement's rapid growth did not fail to catch the eye of the Punjab police. One home department report from 1937 admitted that the Kisan Committee "has obtained a footing in the province", and went on to link it with the Radical League, Congress Socialists, Ghadar Party, and the CPI in spreading discontent in rural areas.

In 1938, the Punjab government's analysis of the Kisan Committee's rapid organizational development concluded that: the central Punjab and colony districts have regularly-constituted Kisan Committees, and that between them and the Punjab Kisan Committee at Amritsar there is a steadily increasing volume of correspondence. The role of the Punjab Kisan Committee in the struggle for peasantry cause was very remarkable and was able to strike very deep. Its rapid development was also due to the political consciousness among different political factions, such as the 1915 Ghadar Party rebellion, the *Sikh Gurdawar* reform movement of the 1920's, and the Kirti-Kisan Party agitation during the early depression years in India, although the top leadership of KPC in 1942 realized that reliance on the Sikhs must be reduced.

The PKC was also very influential in terms of penetrating into the governing unionist party. From government channels circulars were distributed or issued urging the Muslim Kisans to integrate into the movement. Meetings and gatherings were also arranged to stimulate recruitment of workers throughout the province. The Punjab government claimed that the total membership in 1943 was 56,000 while it leaped to 100,608 in 1944. Membership was increased from every district; until 1945 when the total Kisan Committee membership rose to 136,800.

#### **2.4. Imperialist – Feudal Alliance**

The best method and agent for containing the popular people's movement for independence from assuming a revolutionary character after independence was the feudal landlord, who could keep the rural masses under check. On the other hand, in order to consolidate their political position in the country, they required the support of the rural masses. Again, the best agent to accomplish this task was the feudal landlords. Thus, in order to consolidate its own position and establish its own leadership, the British entered into an alliance with feudal landlordism.

The revolt of 1857 combined an army mutiny with a peasant revolt. The killing of British soldiers, control by the rebels of different government buildings, and rebellion all across the Indian sub-continent were important factors that led to an alliance between British imperial power and the landlords. Peasants rose *en masse* as accumulated grievances, particularly against excessive taxes, found expression in a challenge to British rule. Government buildings were destroyed, treasuries were plundered, barracks and court houses were burnt, and prison gates flung open. In some areas the local Indian landowners were also attacked, whilst in other areas landowners joined the rebellion, angered by the pressure of rising taxation.

Master Hari Singh, in his book ‘Agrarian Scene in British Punjab’, sketched this imperial–feudal alliance in a very different way; one of the chapters of this book is devoted to the alliance of British colonial power and the feudal lords of Indian sub-continent. This alliance not only nurtured and protected the feudal aristocracy but also provided a strong platform for the formation of Chief’s associations in the continent.

*“The tribal chiefs were losing their mass base and importance. They were no longer unquestioned natural leaders of the people. To meet this situation, the chiefs of Punjab set up their political organization known as “Chief’s Association”. The inaugural meeting of the association was held at Chief’s College, Lahore, on 23 February 1909. The meeting elected Nawab Behram Khan C.I.E, chief of Mazari tribe, as president, and Partab Singh of Kapurthala as honorary secretary. Lt. Governor Sir, Lois William Dane became patron of the organization. Over 130 aristocrats had joined the association by this time. The Governor gave a dinner in their honor. The London Times giving an account of the meeting had written, “ More than a hundred Chiefs and hereditary nobles of ancient families in the Punjab have formed a political association, the object of which is to support the British government and defend the immemorial supremacy of the aristocracy against disintegrating forces of unrest”. In an address to Governor General Lord Harding at a Garden Party on 4 April 1911, at Lahore, the association spat venom against the emerging freedom movement in the following words:*

*It is a matter of no small consolidation to us to witness the extinction and extirpation of sedition and the anarchist propaganda which have been promoted in some parts of India by mischievous people who are enemies of peace and order and we are confident that ere-long these atrocious misdeeds will be nothing more than history.”<sup>15</sup>*

Colonial rulers set out legally binding treaties between the landlords and princely states; in many cases, these landlords and states had to supply troops to the British government in case of need, and they were also bound to provide lands for rail roads and imperial roads passing through their territories. In return, they were honored with gun salutes, pride, money, land, and royalties.

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15 (Quoted from Master Hari Singh’s book on “Agrarian Scene in British Punjab” Vol I. New Delhi, 1983)

Besides, princes and landlords were very loyal to the British government. In the land settlement operation that took place after annexation of Punjab, and especially after the mutiny, a class of big landlords was formed. Western Punjab was in particular the home of big landlords. Those holding land above 50 acres each formed only 4 percent of landowners, but they held 26 percent of the land. Some new landlords were also created by granting them 20-25 squares of land.

The British government also nurtured and protected the feudal chiefs, nobles and big landlords as the faithful props of its rule. Their sons held preference in attaining jobs and education in British institutions. They were honored with titles like Rai Bahadur, Sir, Raja, Sardar, or Khan Bahadur. Their sons were appointed to the highest posts in both civil and military organizations.

This close alliance benefited both the imperial and the feudal powers. The princes and big landlords rendered great services to the British government in the first and second world wars. They also rendered services to the foreign rulers in suppressing the freedom or anti-colonial movements.

## **2.5. Peasant Uprisings**

The unique feature of this rebellion was the solidarity amongst the rebels cutting across religious and provincial lines. Leaders of the uprising issued proclamations to stress the importance of communal amity amongst the rebels, emphasizing the need of Hindus and Muslims to join their hands to drive out the rulers and protect their own motherland. Peasant revolts, even though caused invariably by acute distress unleashed by rapacious regimes, and marked invariably by remarkable instances of courage, noble heroism and awe-inspiring sacrifice, are nonetheless rarely system-transcending on their own. This uprising underlines the importance of fighting imperialism at all costs. The peasants fought and died for a cause – the cause of national liberation from alien rule. They raised the standard of rebellion when the British power in India was at its ascendant height, and fought relentlessly and shoulder to shoulder for a national cause until the last hour, ignoring religious, ethnic and local divides.

British colonial rule relied on the support of landlords to protect their dominions yet had to occasionally contend with peasant movements pressure-cooked by grossly unequal agrarian relations and the impact of the market. Between 1860 and 1950 (with the exception of half a decade between 1930 and 1935 when prices of agricultural produce did indeed fall) there was a general rise in prices. The single greatest impact of this was the developing struggle between landlord and peasant for control over the increased value of agricultural surplus. The landlord raised rents. Tenants protested. The landlords of Bengal asserted their proprietary rights by stressing their power to evict tenants, while the latter claimed (and were occasionally and with increasing frequency granted) occupancy rights. Over the century, the peasants' ability to resist landlord control of rent and produce increased and the structure of landlordism stood considerably weakened towards the end of British rule in Bengal.

A number of struggles by the peasant and agricultural workers have taken place mainly led by the Left-led peasant and agricultural workers organizations, demanding land, fair prices for peasants and fair wages for agriculture labors, and were met with brutal resistance from landlords and the rural rich in states like Bengal.

This struggle resulted in giving rise to different movements and uprisings in different parts of Bengal, some of which are briefly outlined below, as highlighted by Majid Siddiqui<sup>16</sup>:

*“The Pabna and Boora Uprisings, 1872-1875, in which rich cultivators, benefiting from the commercialization of agriculture and producing cash crops, protested to secure further their occupancy rights granted nominally in 1859. In this they succeeded by 1885 when the Bengal Tenancy Act was passed. Later, by the middle twentieth century, such tenants were transformed into rent-receivers;*

*During the peasants struggle in Bihar, 1933-1942, when prices fell in 1930, the rents to which tenants had agreed in a period of rising prices (1900-1920) became too heavy to bear. Peasants were evicted by landlords as the latter attempted to increase their power and control. The tenants’ movement sought to regain control over the lands from which they were evicted. The core support was provided by rich and middle peasants and occasionally poor peasants.*

*Agricultural laborers were not even formally included in the program of the Peasants Association till 1944; and Share-croppers Agitation in Bengal, 1938-1950 in which the peasantry especially the share-croppers fought landlords for security from eviction and the right to at least two-thirds of the produce. The demand originated from the government's land revenue commission of 1938 and was propagated by the Communist Party in 1946-1947. Share-croppers were joined in their movement by small peasants with occupancy rights, small impoverished landlords and a few rich peasants.”*

In Punjab, the land tax, increase in land revenues, irrigation taxes and other payments caused mass discontent. In response to the repression against demonstrators Kisan Morchas were organized in many districts. Different *jathas* (armed groups) went to present their demands to the State. In Lahore, more than five thousand peasants were imprisoned, assaulted and killed by the police, including the president of All-India Kisan Sabha, Acharya Narendra.

After the Congress session of 1905 the political atmosphere took on a new dimension, with political awareness seeping beyond the urban centers of Amritsar, Ferozepur, Lahore, Sialkot, Rawalpindi and Lyalpur to the seeds of a revolutionary movement though Bengal and Punjab. The *Anjuman-i-Muhabbat-i-Watan*<sup>17</sup> (Organization of Nation Lovers),

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16 Quoted from Majid H. Siddiqui's, "Power, Agrarian Structure, and Peasant Mobilization in Modern India", Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1997

17 Among the main leaders were Ajit Singh, Sufi Amba Prasad and Agha Haider.

organized and pamphleteered, leading to a massive demonstration in district Rawalpindi on April 21, 1907, which was a call for action. The leaders of the peasant movement ordered peasants not to cultivate until the reduction of tax, announcing boycotts of government offices. The leaders of the movement also created awareness among the masses through the distribution of literature. Due to mounting political unrest in the province the Colonization Bill was vetoed, and the land tax and water rates were reduced. Anti-British propaganda against the government's zeal to protect canal colonists reached mass proportions.

In N.W.F.P, the Ghalla Dher Tenant agitation was remarkable; the Nawab of Toru (a protégé of the colonial administration) owned immense amounts of land and, in addition to the usual taxes levied, imposed additional charges, such as payments from brides' and grooms' families at the time of marriage, and penalties for creating disputes that required resolution. The open resistance against the nawab coincided with peasants joining the famous Red Shirt movement, and rapidly spread to neighboring villages. This led to mass arrests, banning of processions and open gatherings, and the outlawing of Kissan Sabhas.

After the elections of 1937, when Congress came into power, the peasantry held rekindled hope that the reign of the feudal lord was over and anticipated general relief and land reforms; however, class solidarities helped forge the links between land owners and politicians. The peasantry of the Ghalla Dher area, having an earlier experience of similar struggles, naturally took the lead in this new upsurge. The movement became a reason for life and death for them. The aggression from the nawabs reached higher degrees, and most of the tillers were thrown out of their homes, with police used as evictors. The nawab's men and police tried to take a possession of lands of peasants in various areas. In response to this, peasants and villagers offered resistance and successfully managed to expel them.

## **2.6. Kisan Conferences: Punjab, Bengal and NWFP**

### **2.6.1. Bengal**

In Bengal, the peasantry movement was also active and organized like the other provincial peasantry movements. After the first District Peasant's Conference in Kshoreganj in 1939, in 1943 a conference was held at Susang-Durgapur. In this conference around 6,000-7,000 people, including Muslims, Hindus, and tribals, participated to discuss a common agenda and their common problems related to land and peasantry. In 1943, in Nalitabari, a District Provincial Conference was convened. Despite its difficult terrain and distance, a number of delegates (including students) from across the province attended this conference. In this conference a decision regarding the training of volunteers was made, and within a few years about four thousand volunteers were trained.

*“In Nalitabari, middle class workers include Jalandhar Pal, Shachi Ray, Ragen Nath, Sivaji Mukerjee, Jiten Maitra among others. The women workers included Jyotsna Neogy, Tulsi Bakshi, Bela (pal) and others. Juinphul Ray was also present at the conference. The peasant activists included Namswar, Birat, Jatin, Moscow, Dignedra, Paresh Sarkar and Lalit Sarkar. They came from different areas and helped in the conference.*

*From the district leadership were present Khoka Ray, Altab Ali, Moni Singh, Kshitish Chakraborty and many others. Procession came from different areas. Ten Thousand people, Hindus, Muslims and tribals, assembled in the public meeting. Members of the presidium of the Krishak Sabha, were comrade Muzaffar Ahmed, Bankim Mukerjee, Syed Nausher Ali, Pramatha Bhounik and Haji Danesh. Bankim Mukerjee delivered a long speech at the meeting, which inspired all the people.”*

*(Quoted from Autobiography of Comrade of Peasantry movement in West Pakistan - Moni Singh, in his book Life is a struggle)*

In 1938, the All-India Peasants' Conference was held for the first time in Comilla, and from then onwards the revolutionary leadership of the peasantry of Bengal continued their efforts to organize the same conferences in collaboration with other peasantry organizations in India. Among these movements the Krishak Sabha is very important to mention here. In 1945, a famous communist leader named comrade Muzaffar Ahmed proposed that the All-India Peasant Conference should be held in Bengal; the place selected for the conference, however, was Netrakona. An historic Peasant's Conference was convened; peasants from far-flung villages, including women and children, attended this event. Activists from different political parties from different parts of the province were present in this mega-event. The people of Netrakona were also overwhelmed with astonishment to see thousands of tribal women. They were surprised with the idea that the communists managed to bring together such a large number of female representation. Everyone was surprised to see the strength and the discipline of the peasant organization.

It is estimated that about one-hundred thousand people attended the opening session of the conference, in which most of the peasants were Muslims. Alongside the Muslims were Hindu and tribal peasants. Many speeches against the atrocities of government and their unjust laws and policies against the peasants of Bengal were made. Many resolutions were adopted on the abolition of Tonk, as well as preparation for the Tebhaga movement and the 'grow more food' campaign. The share-agitation in Bengal from 1938-1950 was flared with mass resistance. The share-croppers were mostly poor peasants with very small holdings, who fought landlords for security from eviction and a right to at least two-thirds of the produce. This demand originated from the government's land revenue commission of 1938 and was propagated by the Communist Party in 1946-1947. Share-croppers were joined in their movement by small peasants with occupancy rights, small impoverished landlords and a few rich peasants. Through legislation in 1950 and 1978-1979, these rights were recognized and pushed through, despite landlord opposition by various governments in independent India.

The Tonk Movement was a peasant struggle waged in some different parts of Bengal province in 1946-50. *Tonk* is a local land tenure term for rent paid in produce. It is like the just like rent in *dhan* i.e., a paddy of south Bengal. Tonk is certainly a tradition which predates money. Peasants paid their rent in paddy. Usually peasants paid paddy rent at the rate of 10 to 15 *maunds* (a maund = 37.5 kg) of paddy for every 1.25 acres of land. In money terms, this was more than double the rate of cash rent. Hence the *raiya*ts (paid

paddy rent) of tonk areas were pressing for a just adjustment of paddy rent with money rent of other raiyats. But landlords refused to recognize the tonk raiyats as regular raiyats. They argued that the tonk raiyats were little more than cultivating slaves, and were thus not entitled to raiyati rights and the right to commutation from kind to cash rent. The movement against tonk and levy began to pick up in 1949, when the East Bengal government sent police and other officers to collect the tonk and levy. These officials used brutal acts, such as physically torturing the people and raping poor women. This did not stop here, as different acts of the use of force and torture were reported from different parts of province. On January 28 1949, a meeting of about 5,000 peasants was held, in which peasants from far-off places joined in. They passed a resolution for the abolition of zamindari without compensation, the abolition of the tonk system, the participation of local peasants' committees in collection of government revenues, and procurement of food grains. An open armed struggle between the peasants and government resulted, and huge confrontations between the police and the peasant workers took place. After some time, the peasants realized that it was not possible to fight the government's armed forces with sticks, bows and arrows; it was necessary to use firearms. From then onwards, fierce fighting between the peasants and police took place, killing many people on both sides.

The armed struggles of the peasants under the leadership of communists lasted for about one and half years in East Pakistan, coming to an end before the middle of 1950. The collapse of the peasant movement, after such a short period of struggle, was the result of the serious limitations and problems it had from the very beginning. The sudden change and cooperation with the government for solving certain immediate problems of the policy of armed struggle against the state machinery created lot of confusion. The struggle took a decade to pick up again.

### **2.6.2. Punjab**

To understand the deteriorating conditions of the Punjab peasantry under the impact of the landlord's suppression, peasant organizations spread throughout the Punjab at the end of 1920's. In the Punjab, various government measures, such as the Land Constitution Act 1900, the Land Alienation Act 1901, the Transfer Property Act 1904, and the Punjab Pre-emption Act 1905, provoked complex reactions. In Punjab, Zamindar Sabha was active in Amritsar district. Different conferences were held in protest against different proposed rules.

These conferences were not only confined to any particular district or region, but were spread throughout the province. In Jalandhur and Hoshiarpur districts, the propaganda tours of the Kirti Kisan Sabha agitations were prominent. The Zamindar League also advocated extreme views and staged a number of constitutional and semi-loyalist bodies of agriculturists, and held meetings and passed resolutions against their landlords.

On 12 November 1932, the Provincial Kirti Kisan Sabha held a conference in Nankana in which all active workers of the party participated. Different speeches against the capitalist class were delivered, accusing them of being exploiters of peasantry in Punjab. Party manifestos and pamphlets were distributed all across the province. Similarly, the Punjab

Zamindar League also held a conference in Nankan in November 1933, in which a resolution was passed demanding a reduction in land revenues and water rates, and the extirpation of bribery in the irrigation department.

Then in 1934 in Lahore district a Zamindar conference was convened. In this conference, in a resolution regarding the levy of land revenue on the basis of income tax, suggestions on various methods of alleviating agricultural indebtedness were approved. The agrarian policies of the government were criticized at another Kisan conference held in 1938 in district Hoshiyarpur. At the same time, yet another conference in district Ludhiana was arranged in which the atrocities of the policies on the peasants regarding the collection of land revenue by speakers were discussed.

On the issue of canal water a significant development was made in district Kasur, and Sahiwal, when in 1939 a committee was formed to instigate the peasants to refuse canal water as a protest against the enhancement of revenue under the new settlement in Lahore, and against the refusal of the government to accept the familiar socialist demands, which included reduction of the revenue and revenue on water. In the same context, in Ferozepur, a committee was formed on the same reasoning for the purpose of protecting the rights of peasants in relation to the revenue on agrarian water.

Mr. S. D Gajrani, describes this event in one of his contribution on the “Punjab Under British Raj”, as;

*“In the beginning of 1939, a new development occurred in the Kasur subdivision of the Lahore district and the Dipalpur tehsil of Montgomery (Sahiwal). A committee was formed to instigate the peasants to refuse canal water as a protest against the enhancement of revenue under the new settlement in Lahore and against the refusal of the Government to accept the familiar socialist’s demands which included reduction of the revenue and abiana. The Kisans also decided to continue the civil-disobedience until their demands were met. The peasant agitation also spread to the Ferozepur district where a Water Rate Reduction Committee had been formed. Forty outlets had been closed by the agitators. The running of the administration in Lahore had been taken over by the Provincial Kisan Committee and Volunteers had been summoned from other districts. Groups of Kisans had left the Ambala, Jullundur and Ferozepur districts, and on their way to Lahore they did propaganda work in villages. In brief, the agitation in Lahore, Montgomery (Sahiwal) and Ferozepur to get peasants to refuse canal water had made much headway.”*

Thus the various political associations and advocacy campaigns for the rights of peasants were organized in different parts of the province. This anti-imperialist struggle was directly against British policies. Almost all of these peasantry organizations, whether small or big, jointly challenged the authoritarian and arbitrary suppression and involved the masses in a united struggle against their atrocities. The larger struggle by nationalists against British imperialism was vigorously launched to liberate their land.

### 2.6.3. The Frontier Province

*“The peasantry in NWFP like their other counterparts all over the country was in depressed conditions particularly, due to agricultural indebtedness, pressure of land revenue demands and inadequacy of tenancy rights.”*

*(In Amit Kumar Gupta’s “North West Frontier Province Legislature and Freedom struggle 1932 – 1947”)*

Different conferences were held to discuss this matter on the general requirements of the peasantry movement. The Congress – Khudai Khidmatgar movement got its strength in NWFP mainly from the support of peasants and artisans. The peasantry movement and its supporters were subjugated, and most of its workers were arrested from different parts of frontier province. In 1938, Dr. Khan Saheb presented the whole scenario in the All-India Congress Committee session in Delhi. This gained popularity among the masses.

The Red Shirt movement in NWFP was very active. Different processions and conferences were convened in different districts of NWFP. In 1939, a huge gathering of peasants of the Frontier province was convened in Manshera district, in which the president of the peasants Molana Mufti Abdul Raheem Populzai delivered his historic speech. This district peasant conference was attended by peasants from all across the province, including Swat, Chitral and the tribal areas. In this two-day conference, feudalism in the frontier province was highly criticized by the speakers. For the first time, the importance, role and function of the peasantry organizations was clearly presented in front of its participants.

In the same year in Hazara district, another peasant conference was organized by the peasantry revolutionary workers of the Frontier province. The agenda of the conference was not different from the other conferences, but in this conference the delegates and speakers adopted a resolution to counter the emerging threats and malpractices of landlords. Inhumane policies such as the annual *Tawan* (tax), the withdrawal of food items from poor peasants, birth and death taxes, and the atrocities of police and landlords were criticized.

## 2.7. Agrarian Legislation

In South Asia, especially in such densely populated areas as the Indian sub-continent, agitation has been mainly for redistribution among landless laborers, security of tenure, and the elimination of middle-men, oppressive rents, and usurious interest. The establishment of British rule in the Indian subcontinent embarked on some major political and legislative development in Indian society and history. The East India Company, which ruled parts of India in the 18th century, took steps to introduce autonomous judicial and political administration in its territories.

They introduced rule of law in Indian society during the early days of colonialism; their main focus was to create a rule of property in the native land, and secondly to create rules of adjudication. In creating an appropriate rule of adjudication, there were two streams of

effort and consciousness: one which emphasized that the new rules should be based on the existing rules of Indian society; and second, one which thought that the native rules were too confused and should be formalized and codified. In doing so, many rules and regulations formulated by the imperialists conflicted with the indigenous system and resulted in different forms of resistance. The chronological development of the agrarian legislation is given as follows.

After the British Conquest of Punjab and N.W.F.P (first Punjab in 1868), a proprietor could rent land to tenants on such terms as he thought fit under the law, but he was always responsible for payments of land revenue. Rents were generally taken in the form of share of the produce. A definite share of grain heap was taken on the threshing-floor. Estimates of shares were made through the appraisal of standing crops i.e. through *Kankut*. The appraised were generally pro-landlord and therefore the Kakut system was weighted against the tenants. Rent constituted a share of the produce which the state had claimed in the pre-British days. In good land Batai rent was one-half of the produce, but big landlords, over and above the rents, exacted various illegal levies or *nazranas* for payments of wages to menial and gifts at the time of marriage of their sons and daughters.

Then in 1887, the Punjab Tenancy Act was passed by the imperials. The Act barred all inquiries into the status of tenants. No tenant could lay claim to occupancy rights by virtue of mere lapse of time. These rights could be granted only on special cases. A tenant, it was provided in the Act, could not be ejected at will until after the issue of note passed through a revenue court. Notice could be issued only at a particular season of the year and opportunity was given to the tenant to contest his liability to ejection or to claim compensation for unexhausted improvements as a condition precedent to relinquishment of land.

The Punjab Alienation of Land Act, passed in the imperial legislative council of India on October 19, 1900, came into force in June 1901. The Act was aimed at placing certain restrictions on the transfer of agricultural land in the Punjab, with a view to check its alienation from the agricultural to non-agricultural classes. It also prohibited all mortgages except the "automatic repayment mortgage", where after the expiry of the term of mortgage (which was limited to a maximum of 15 years) the land reverted to the mortgage with the debt extinguished. The act, as a rule, benefited the agriculturists, but the advantages were apportioned mainly between the landlords and the rich peasants.

This act divided official and public opinion in the province, both vertically and horizontally on both a class and communal basis. It tried to buttress the rural foundations of British rule at a time when trading castes were showing their capacity for organization and agitation. The act divided the population along lines of agricultural and non-agricultural tribes. The communal implications of the measure were not perceptible initially, but gradually the interested sections gave it a communal twist, which helped in furthering sectarian politics in the province. The varying composition of the population in different parts of Punjab also contributed towards the promotion of communalism in the body politic of the region. Whereas, in the western districts, where the Sahukars were

invariably Hindus and the agriculturists mostly Muslims, the situation assumed serious communal proportions.

Under the proclamation of 5<sup>th</sup> October 1901, the province of the Punjab was divided into two administration zones, the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province. In 1906 the colonization bill was introduced, which brought the Punjab within the vortex of revolutionary agitation. The bill sought to change the very basis of land relationships in the Punjab and attempted to deprive the farmers, who had been uprooted from the districts of central Punjab and brought to west Punjab to dig canals and irrigate barren extension crown waste-lands in this region, and who now ran the risk of losing their own lands. It was also feared that the status of the grantees would be reduced to those of ordinary tenants, as the government planned to convert these lands into plantations, like those of the Assam tea gardens. Under the bill, it was also proposed to considerably increase land revenue and irrigation rates in the Bari Doab Canal.

In 1927, the Punjab Land Revenue (Amendment) Bill created keen interest among the members. While some were in favor of the introduction of a permanent settlement of land revenue (subject to certain conditions), others advocated total exemption from payment of land revenue on holdings not exceeding two acres of irrigated land and four acres in other areas. In 1938, some major legislative developments were introduced, starting from the 1938 Registration of Moneylenders Bill, which sought to limit the business of money lending only to registered and licensed moneylenders. The license could be suspended by the collector for a fixed period if the moneylender was found guilty of an offence by a law court. In the absence of a license, or during its suspension, the moneylenders were disqualified from recovering their loans. The Bill was to be applicable to all moneylenders, including those agriculturists who had taken money lending as a principal or subsidiary business. After this bill, the Punjab Alienation of Land (3<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Bill was introduced, aimed at protecting the agricultural debtor from the agriculturist moneylenders by restricting the alienation of land from the debtor to the creditor. Following this bill, and also in 1938, The Punjab Agricultural Produce Marketing Bill was introduced. The main aim of this bill was to protect the growers of agricultural commodities from the various malpractices of shopkeepers and brokers. The bill provided for the establishment of Market Committees and a Market Committee Fund with certain defined functions and powers.

The NWFP Agriculturist Debtor's Relief Act was next to come after the Marketing bill. The emphasis in this Act was checking the fraudulent practices of the Mhajans and subjecting them to a process of registration with the government, ensuring proper maintenance of accounts and the fixation of justifiable rates of interests. In March 1938, the government introduced the NWFP Agricultural Products Market Bill with the object – not to facilitate the marketing of agricultural products of the cultivators – but to protect them from the many dishonest tradesmen in town, the cunning buyers of food grains. In effect, the bill merely aimed at preventing irregularities in measurement and introducing standards in the use of weight.

### **3. Post Partition Struggle**

#### **3.1. Preamble**

The issues of peasants' land rights, collective farming, peasantry movements and agrarian struggle have been discussed in the previous chapters, starting from the Mughal's period until the British Imperialist rule of the Indian sub-continent. In this particular portion, documentation and compilation of the problems is reviewed and presented for the better understanding of its readers. This portions deals with the post-partition scene in Pakistan, unearthing basic facts and developing a sequence of study in chronological order. However, the intention is to move ahead from earlier controversies and to explore the current situation with reference to peasantry movements and land rights in Pakistan.

This background study presents the findings of a document and literature survey on farmers' rights, in order to establish a clear understanding and linkage between the origin of the concept and its history. However, it emerged that several central documents pertaining to farmers' rights seemed to have been overlooked in the literature. Thus, this overview is also a history of the developments in this field, and gives a clear picture of prevailing situation in Pakistan in different provinces, through different reforms and policies developed from time to time to address this problem.

The intention of this documentation and compilation work on this issue is to present and summarize the material. It is hoped that this guide to the different key documents and literature available can be helpful to practitioners and researchers who seek to understand the core issues. To ensure the broadest possible coverage of central documents and literature pertaining to farmers' rights, an extensive search on the issue took place, using various databases, traced reference lists for available literature, and several reports and biographies.

#### **3.2. An Overview**

After independence, the first six years of the peasant movement again had to face severe repression at the hands of the government. Afraid of the tempo of the growing revolutionary movement, it unleashed repression, making the functioning of various units impossible. The All-India Kisan Sabha was not able to hold any session until April 1953. Despite this, the foundation was set in terms of the creation of different peasant organizations and their support from the masses (and in many cases from political parties). These organizations were busy in organising resistance in East Pakistan, NWFP, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan, especially on the question of evictions, and militant fights were put up in many states.

Subsequently, various governments were forced to take measures of land reforms, such as ceiling legislations, security of tenure and rent reduction, consolidation of holdings, et cetera, but all failed to fulfil the declared objectives. On the other hand, the period witnessed a large-scale eviction offensive, throwing millions of tenants into the position of agricultural workers.

In the late 1950s the struggles were on the issues of land, fair rights for peasants' produce, debt relief, the defence of the rights of tribal people, and the burden of heavy taxation. The most important of these was the heroic struggle of the Punjab peasantry against the imposition of the 'betterment levy tax' in the beginning of 1959. This was fought under the flag of the Kisan Sabha after the epoch-making Telengana struggle. The peasants defied firings, lathi-charges, beatings, and all other types of repression. The 'all-in' peasant unity forged during the struggle was unparalleled, when peasants united irrespective of their political affiliations. The movement ultimately forced the government to withdraw from various unjustified and illegal regulations.

The agrarian crisis was further aggravated in the 1960s. By mid-1960 stagnation in agriculture and the consequent food crisis had worsened. The bourgeois-landlord classes began losing their hold over the mass of the peasantry, with the result that in the 1967 elections the Congress monopoly of power was broken in eight states; West Bengal and Kerala gave victory to the Left and other democratic forces, among which the CPI (M) played an important role. Peasant struggles took place in different states on a variety of issues. In Kerala and West Bengal, these struggles were most widespread and became intimately connected with political issues.

The United Front Government of West Bengal and Kerala made a big impact on the masses, not only in their home states but also in the rest of the country. When the central government dismissed these governments, hundreds of thousands of peasants joined the struggle for democracy in West Bengal, and combined this with the struggle for defending their land and crops.

Mid-term elections gave a bigger victory to the United Front in West Bengal and the peasant movement attained a wider sweep. Millions of peasants from all over the state unleashed an unprecedented struggle, with the backing of the United Front Government, for recovering *benami* land for possession and distribution of surplus lands, for loans in kind and for checking hoarding and black-marketing. In this period, more than three hundred thousand acres of land were located, taken over and distributed among the landless through village level committees. Many peasants lost their lives in the battles fought on this issue, but it gave an impetus to the Kisan movement in its spread to all districts.

These struggles achieved important gains and helped in raising the political consciousness of the peasantry. It was because of these peasantry organizations and their associations and conferences that the movement was able to face its serious consequences, in the shape of mass arrests, killing of hundreds of poor peasants et cetera. But they fought back the repression and defended their interests.

In Punjab and Sindh, peasants conducted a state-wide movement for agrarian and debt relief legislation for their rights on government lands against threat of central intervention. As a result of the campaign, serious measures from the government side, in the shape of relief in revenues and release of lands for poor peasants or landless farmers, were ensured and duly distributed among them. The ceiling was revised downwards and made family-

based, many exemptions were withdrawn, and hutment dwellers were given rights to land on which they lived. Tens of thousands of agricultural labourers conducted powerful and successful struggles for better wages and living conditions.

Discontent found expression in other parts of Pakistan as well. In NWFP, Balochistan and Bengal, et cetera, widespread struggles took place concerning the occupation of forest or government lands and against eviction from these lands. In Punjab and (former) East Pakistan, widespread agitation took place on the questions of land distribution, tenancy acts and other issues related to revenue and peasants' problems. Struggles took place against increased taxation on the question of food and relief rent reduction and against unjust levies. Militant struggles of agricultural labourers took place in and spread throughout the districts of the frontier province as well as other parts of the country.

### **3.2.1. East Pakistan**

The peasants' struggle of the Bengal and its journey of agitation started with the creation of All-India Kisan Sava. On January 16-17 a meeting of Kisan Sava was held in Burdwan, in which a decision regarding the creation of separate organizations for India and Pakistan, called All-India Kisan Sava and All-Pakistan Kisan Sava was proposed to reflect the changed situation after partition. Mansur Habibullah was nominated as the convener for All-Pakistan Kisan Sava. Conditions at that time in West Pakistan were such that it was not possible for them to organize the Kisan Sava on an 'all-Pakistan' basis. It was therefore decided to first organize the East Pakistan Kisan Sava, and accordingly a committee was constituted with Moni Singh as president and Mansur Habibullah as general secretary.

Starting from the former East Pakistan (Bengal), the minimum demands included: the cancellation of rent and revenue arrears; exemption of un-economic holdings from land revenue; reduction of rent revenue and water rates by half; the immediate granting of rights to permanent cultivation to tenants cultivating land held by zamindars, talukdars, Jagirdars, Khans et cetera, as well as rent remission for these tenants; graduated taxation of agricultural income; the abolition and penalisation of all feudal and customary dues, forced labour and illegal exactions; the arrangement of credit from the state cooperatives and land mortgage banks; the stabilisation of agricultural prices; minimum wage legislation to recognise the collective action of the peasants; insurance for cattle fires and health; adult enfranchisement; and the establishment of village *panchayats* for managing civic affairs and communal land among others.

*“From early February 1969 the industrial workers turned their attentions to their own specific problems but remained active in the political struggle. Throughout the 1960s, strikes had been declared unlawful by the Ayub Government and there had been very little scope for trade union activities. So, for the workers, there was no real way of attaining their demands under such repression. Towards the end of December 1968 Bhashani announced a (gherao) encirclement program for the peasants and asked them gherao village hats (weekly rural markets), tehsil offices, police stations and other government offices and wit as meant to be a rural substitute of urban*

*strikes. The gerao movement was initially launched in the rural areas and it did not spread out except in few places. That happened in March 1969, but by then it was extended to the industrial areas and it had begun effectively in February...”*

*(Quoted from, Badruddin Umar’s, “The Emergence of Bangladesh”, vol 2: Rise of Bangali Nationalism (1958- 1971) Oxford University Press, 2006)*

Another important point to be noted here is that the slogan ‘seizure of land from landlords’ and its distribution was raised more intensively than in the pre-partition period. Landless and poor peasants became more conscious and organised enough to go into action for the seizure of landlords’ lands. Regarding surplus land (above the ceiling which the landlords were legally allowed), the struggle advanced beyond the stage of locating such surplus land and exposing the government’s claims. Peasantry organizations in Bengal in 1969 raised their voice to address this issue of surplus land.

During 1948–1950, peasant movements under the leadership of various communist factions of Bengal took place in the Nankar areas of Sylhet and in the tribal, scheduled caste and Santal inhabited areas of Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rajshahi and some other small pockets. Since the creation of East Pakistan, there were serious problems faced by the peasants, including famine, food shortages in different parts of the province, and shortages of kerosene, edible oil et cetera. On the other hand, continuous increases in the prices of all essential commodities compelled the poor peasants to raise their voices. In order to carry out a mass peasants struggle, it was essential to make the peasantry movement conscious about their problems, and turn this mass movement into an organized and mobilized radical political action.

A series of agitations, protests and anti-government demonstrations were carried out throughout the province, and fierce fighting erupted with deaths on both sides. Many leaders and workers of the peasantry movement were arrested and killed by the police and government authorities.

*“In 1950, the Kisan Sava and the communist party decided to observe Shaheed day on 31, January, of Rasimoni and Surenda. It was also decided that tributes would also be paid to martyrs who were killed by the landlord and government forces since 1946. As a follow up of this decision the largest assembly of armed peasants in the entire Hanjang inhabited area of the district of Mymensingh took place. Armed guerilla groups in all areas were instructed to gather there on 31 January. All peasants and other people were also urged to be present there during the occasion. Thirty guerilla groups, each consisting of ten guerillas, with rifles, sten guns, ordinary guns, muskets and hand bombs guarded the valley where 1500 peasants came from different areas armed with axes, spears, choppers etc. at the end of this procession the resolution was passed and was also sent to the government.”*

The armed struggle of the peasants under the leadership of the communist party and other allied peasantry organizations lasted for many years in East Pakistan. The collapse of the movement was the result of serious limitations and problems it had from the very beginning. The sudden change from peaceful struggle and cooperation with the government for solving certain immediate problems to a policy of armed struggle and attack on state machinery created a lot of confusion among the ranks and file workers, as well as on the part of the leadership.

This led to the weakening of both the communist party and Kisan Sava. Slogans characterized the independence of the country as false, and advocated a program of overthrowing the state of Pakistan; instead of motivating the people, this created a certain level of hostility among the Muslim masses, which despite being increasingly anti-government were far from wishing the liquidation of Pakistan. Thus this sudden change of policy went a long way in isolating the Communist party and the Kisan Sava from the people, and the government used this isolation to the maximum possible extent in formulating their line of attack on the communists, as well as the peasant's movements, by the extensive use of communalism. This was effective because in this period all the major peasant struggles were concentrated in areas overwhelmingly inhabited by non-Muslim tribes.

The communist party, instead of organizing their masses and launching an armed struggle at the height of such a movement, adopted the opposite line of developing mass discontent through armed struggle. As a consequence the organized areas were soon destroyed, which led to the rapid collapse of the peasant movement.

The peasantry organizations, while conducting peasant movements in different areas, had no definite program of land reform and there was little awareness of the other major problems of the peasants which required urgent attention. As a result of all this they had no definitive organizational plan from which they could organize the peasants in other areas, in addition to the areas inhabited by tribal people

The new peasant organization, like its predecessor, had no definite program of reform or anything related to the various vital problems of the peasantry. Its principle work was in agitation. It held periodical conferences in which peasants problems were discussed in general terms, but very little emerged in terms of definite and concrete program.

### **3.2.2. Sindh**

It is in this context that the peasantry in Sindh pursued its alternative line for the betterment of land reforms and other peasantry issues, the line of completing the agrarian revolution in unity with the poor working class, and to continue a struggle which led the mass of the peasantry in a positive direction after gaining an independent state. Since independence the situation has changed; although land monopoly remains intact as it was in the past, there are many changes which need to be addressed in the agrarian structure of Sindh, and which require a changed approach in building peasant unity and leading the agrarian revolution to success. The Sindh province, like other provinces of Pakistan, has

not escaped from the repression of landlordism and other illegal agrarian issues. Although the green revolution in the agricultural sector started after almost a decade, it had no positive effects on the poor Haris of Sindh at all. A well-developed ideological superstructure, which legitimized and sanctified the concentration of land in the hands of a few landlords and their control over all aspects of peasants' lives, reflected the pre-existence of a deeply-entrenched material base of feudal relations of production. This was in contrast to the NWFP and parts of the Punjab where the superstructure tended to lag behind the emerging property relations.

*“For more than two decades since independence in 1947, little change came about in the agrarian system of Sind. The tenancy legislation, passed in 1950, had no effect on providing security to the small number of tenants who were made eligible to become permanent. The new lands brought under cultivation by Kotri and Guddu Barrages were either allotted to military officers and civil bureaucrats or sold to Punjabi farmers and Sindhi landlords. The nearly two million acres of land, left behind by the Hindus who migrated to India since 1947, were allotted to urban-based and Urdu-speaking refugees from India, thus creating a new class of urban absentee landlords. The land reforms of 1959 forced most big landlords to make intra-family transfers, but otherwise made small difference in the pattern of landownership. However, these reforms set the stage for a more concentrated effort at capitalist development that was to follow.”*

*(Quoted from Feroz Ahmad, “Sind: National and Democratic Struggle”, Pakistan Democratic Forum, Special Issue, April 1984)*

The Poor Haris of Sindh always lived in a very primitive condition. They still have no social, political and economic security. Their lives are not organized as equal citizens of Pakistan. Their life and livelihood has always been dominated by the zamindars. The Haris, who have cultivated their lands for generations, are not convinced about their future. Fear of the landlords, the loss of their land, wealth, life and other material assets constantly made their life miserable. They are constantly threatened by their landlords with imprisonment and bonded labor.

The poor Haris of Sindh fought for the independence of Pakistan and voted for the Muslim League in the hope that they would in return see better days; that he would own the land he cultivated and the miserable conditions and atrocities of the era of landlordism would end. But what has the Hari received? The situation on the ground is worse than ever.

After the creation of Pakistan, the entire control and responsibility of allotments was under the Sindh government and the rehabilitation commissioner. The Sindh government passed the Tenancy Act in 1950 which conferred limited rights upon limited Haris; for this reason, the government formulated a committee to make recommendations for a tenancy law in Sindh. This committee was known as the Tenancy Legislation Committee, put to task to address the following issues:

1. Is it necessary or desirable to give tenancy right to the Haris?

2. If so, which class of Haris?
3. What shall constitute a tenancy right?
4. What procedures or penalties are necessary to give effect to the proposals?

With some amendments in the bill, Mr. Khurho in proposed the bill in the Sindh Legislative Assembly (whose members were all against the interests of Haris). Some of its points are as follows:

- a) In section 2 (14), a Hari could be deprived of his tenancy rights at any time in the event of mechanized cultivation.
- b) In section 4, by going under the protection of the encumbered Estate Act or the Court of Wards Act, a Zamindar could terminate the Hari's tenancy rights.
- c) In Section 13, a Zamindar could evict a Hari without reference to the Tribunal.
- d) In section 18, the original Bill had provided  $\frac{1}{4}$  Share of straw to be given to the Zamindar and  $\frac{3}{4}$  to be given to the Hari. Mr. Khuhro's amendment reduced the Hari's share in case of flow to  $\frac{1}{2}$  and in the case of lift to  $\frac{2}{3}$ <sup>rd</sup>.
- e) By amending Section 28, Mr. Khurho introduced the definition of Agent to mean:
  - (a) In the case of a landlord, a relation or Kamdar or Mushi of the landlord.
  - (b) In the case of a Hari, a relation of the Hari or other Hari of the same Deh.

This totally restricted the rights and choices available for Haris. It was during the governorship of Sheikh Muhammad who, in his 92-A Rule, amended the Sindh Tenancy Act and passed the Rules, by an ordinance, on the representation of the Hari workers. Messer Khuro became subject to the enquiry and was found guilty, as pointed out in earlier paragraphs.

The Sindh peasantry organizations, mainly the Sindh Hari Committee, always insisted that land should belong to the tiller and that the present zamindari system must go, to be replaced by peasant proprietorship. They were successful in changing this situation; different responsible persons in the government supported proprietorship on a desirable proportion.

*“Demands have been made by the Haris and the public generally that Kotri Barrage lands may be granted to the landless peasants without further delay; but the authorities seem to have no ears to hear, no hearts to feel, and no eyes to see. Their silence seems the silence of guilty conscience. All the state land is the nation's property, belongs to that part of the nation that works on the land; that feeds the nation; that produce the cotton to clothe the nation; that produces things that feed our industry that pay for our essential imports.”*

*(Lands in Sindh: who should own them?, July 1957, Hari Haqdar Press Hyderabad)*

Independence caused Hindu-Muslim riots in some provinces of India. There was mass migration of Muslims from some provinces of India to Pakistan and Hindus from Pakistan to India. The first action of the government of Pakistan was to accommodate a large number of immigrants, settling the immigrants (Mohajirs) in place of out-going or evacuee

Hindus, on the latter's property. The Land Alienation bill for restoring land to Sindhi Muslims was not allowed to become operative as the Land Alienation Act by the government of Pakistan and thereby 40% of land transferred (due to mortgages in possession of out-going Hindus) in the rural areas of Sindh was allotted to the immigrants from India. The immovable property vacated by out-going Hindus in large cities, consisting of commercial establishments, industries, shops and residential houses (erected during the 104-year British rule) was allotted to go to the immigrants. In spite of being properties of the government of Sindh and the Sindhis, none of the evacuee property, except residential housing already under occupation by Sindhis (costing less than \$2000) was allotted or sold to Sindhis. This included 40% of agricultural land transferred to money lenders as previously stated. Thus Sindh's participation in the Pakistan movement was rewarded by means of an economic kickback.

In 1959 the first "Pakistan Land Reform" under martial law was enforced, limiting the higher ceilings of land-holdings to 500 acres and enforcing the surrender of lands above that ceiling. This limit served only one major purpose of the military regime in Sindh: it crippled the power of big land-owners to purchase any more land, and almost all of them had to surrender some land. They were afraid that the future had more of such reforms in store for them and therefore it became a dead-end for them to purchase any more land at that time or any time thereafter.

Soon after the declaration of "Land Reform", the West Pakistan Government in 1960 declared its policy for the sale of government land in the Kotri Barrage area of Sindh; a similar policy was to follow for Guddu Barrage two years later. Quotas of land were fixed for the various categories of allottees from different areas of the country. Active and retired personnel of the army, navy, air force, and civil service (having emeritus awards) most of whom from the Punjab and Mangla dam, displaced persons from Punjab, N.W.F.P. tribal areas, flood-affected peoples of East Pakistan, rain-fed areas and other districts of Punjab, through mechanized cultivation. Those who wanted to begin mechanized agriculture, and could show that they had a tractor but without documentary proof to the project director irrespective of domicile from any part of Pakistan et cetera.

No quota was fixed for the landless farmers of Sindh. A very large number (not shown on the 100 year old survey and settlement departments maps) of un-registered grave-yards and mosques were also excluded from the agricultural land being allotted. These were bulldozed and villagers thrown out. Most of the 1.6 million acres of government land in Kotri Barrage and 1.1 million acres in Guddu Barrage was allotted this way to non-Sindhis, mostly from the Punjab, on an installment basis at extremely low prices fixed by government of Pakistan. The price fixed was Rs. 350 per acre in Kotri barrage and Rs. 550 in Guddu Barrage. Complete arrangements were made to receive the allottees of these lands, organizing transport to the site, and taqavi (development) loans were granted for the purchase of bullocks, seeds and fertilizer. For allottees of the armed forces, official transport was provided and camps erected to build temporary housing. The best perennial land on the "Land Channel" of Kotri Barrage was allotted to the armed forces. Besides the above concessions, the allottees had to pay 10% of the rates fixed as a first installment, and the balance had to be paid in 10 annual installments with a grace period of three years. The

provision of a grace period was a first in the history of land allotment in the sub-continent. A small part of land in areas near Karachi and Sukkur was sold by method of open auction. The motive here was to sell lands to the urban people of Karachi and Sukkur (and invariably Punjabi businessmen and industrialists) to form a base for cash crops near these urban settlements. Some Sindhis participated in the open auctions, but the urban bidders purchased at rates about 3 to 4 times the rates fixed by the government. The large land-holding local chiefs of Sindh could not purchase the land in these auctions because of the ceiling on holdings under the land reforms, and small land-holders and landless farmers had no means to purchase land in open auction.

### **3.2.3. N.W.F.P**

The peasantry of NWFP had already experienced betrayal by the landlords during the struggles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The situation in the different districts, and the dominance of the Khans and landlords (who inherited thousands of acres of land) were as strong as they were in the British period. The communists and other peasantry organizations and parties learnt from the experience of the landlords and their alliances with administrations (considered their natural leaders), and decided to organise the peasantry independently as a social class, though working in cooperation with other anti-imperialist classes.

In NWFP, the peasantry movement was already active even before partition. In the wake of illegal evictions of peasants and unjustified distribution of profits made on the land, the Kisan Jirga in NWFP was created under the supervision and leadership of Dr. Khan Sahib. Its action programme for the peasants included protection against eviction, reduction on all economic rent in ryotwari settlement areas, the eventual abolition of permanent settlements, abolition of *begar*, protection against oppression by the khans and nawabs, free irrigation, et cetera. The peasants of NWFP resisted against illegal policies of the government and protested all across the province for their rights. This mass agitation sped across the provinces and gained popularity in Peshawar, Mardan and other districts of NWFP.

The peasants of NWFP refused to pay the nazranas and Betai on the crops and demanded that the share of the crops should be distributed on equal terms once the crops were collected. The Betai should be distributed as a 50–50 percent share on the crops. The slogan of '*Ghalla Dheri*' was common across the province. The government, witnessing this situation, supported the zamindars and, in this connection, arrests of peasants took place. The government and the zamindars failed to stop this movement from escalating into a mass struggle, however, and partially agreed to the demands of peasants.

After partition the movement halted for some time because of the migration of most of the Hindu peasants to India. It was in 1948, when the Khans began mass evictions of peasants from their land, that peasants from different parts of the province re-organized their efforts and protested against this illegal eviction; their agitation failed, however, to achieve their objectives regarding the retention of land and their due share on the crops.

The Khans of Hashtnagar in Tehsil Charsadda, Peshawar, one of the province's most fertile lands, preferred to cultivate their lands by their own means. For this reason, they purchased tractors and started cultivation. This land is very significant in terms of sugar cane production. The zamindars of this area began massive evictions. Simultaneously, an alliance between the Awami National Party and Jamaat-e-Islami was formed. Most landlords were members of the parties, and they (with the help and support of the administration) went ahead with the peasant eviction policy. This atrocity, caused by the alliance of landlords and party workers, resulted in huge unrest among the exploited peasants. On separate occasions some serious fights between the peasants and Khans erupted.

During the People's Party government in NWFP, in the newly formed districts of Swat and Malakand, landlords, mostly political party members, brutally killed many workers and peasants.

This worsening condition for the peasants of NWFP was also occurring in the Punjab and other provinces. But unlike their counterparts, they have not succeeded in achieving desirable results and rights. The main reason for their failure in this regard was the lack of organization in the NWFP movement compared with the other provinces. All it needed was to show how successfully they could organise agricultural workers and poor peasants and bring them into action, not only for their own specific demands, but also on the general demands of the peasantry as a whole, and how far they would be able to draw other sections of the peasantry into movements on issues affecting them.

The peasants of NWFP realized that political parties, whether the National Awami Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, or any other political force, have no sympathy for poor farmers; instead of supporting their cause, they have always defended the capitalist class and landlords to protect their own personal interests. The peasants have always been used for others' interests.

The progressive factions of the political movement in NWFP laid the foundation of the Kisan Jirga Committee and its sub-committees, formed and organized at grassroots level in different districts of NWFP.

*'Land to the tiller'* and *'total abolition of landlordism'* have been basic slogans of the peasants of NWFP since its inception. In order to protect the rights of peasants and promote the seizure and distribution of the landlords' holdings, a new movement known as the *Hashtnagar movement*, with the slogan of *'peasantry rights'* came into being in 1948. In order to propagate the idea of land rights among the peasantry and other democratic classes, the movement had to gain momentum. During 1948 this movement was suppressed by the Qayyum Khan government; at the same time, in the villages of district Mardan, Fazal Kili, Khazana Dheri, Jamodar, and Khanpur, the same struggle was carried out by the poor farmers, also suppressed by the republican government of Mr. Khan Sahib.

In 1968, the peasantry movement entered into new era of agitation against the ruling elite and the landlords they supported; in early 1968 the Mazdoor Kisan Party was formed. The workers left the old traditions of party fights and the exploitation of the workers for their

own interests. The Kisan Mazdoor Party was a new hope for the peasantry organization in NWFP; it preferred to work from the grassroots level and selected rural areas of the province as its base of operations, instead of relying on support from the big cities. This change in tactics brought a considerable change in the movement and the peasantry struggle entered into a new phase, joining hands with other parties like the Hashtnagar movement et cetera.

During this time the Hashtnagar movement was also gained widespread support from the masses all across the province. They set forth a new agenda with renewed zeal in their line of actions. Their objectives were:

1. Organize rural peasants and create rural bases of peasant power, to eliminate the political, social and economic slavery of the peasants;
2. Fundamental rights to the Kisan; quarrels between them to be settled, through people's courts;
3. Ejectment and fines to be eliminated;
4. Rent increase to stop;
5. Wage increase of rural proletariat to improve their living conditions;
6. Self- cultivated lands to be distributed among the rural labourers;
7. To enlist the small owners to the movement and to eliminate the contradiction in a friendly manner between the small owner and the tenant;
8. To end Khan's violence.

This resulted in many positive developments:

- Kisan organizations had been formed under the Mazdoor Kisan Party (MKP) and their political consciousness was raised; there were now peasant leaders who accepted proletarian ideology;
- People's courts were set up and bye laws were enacted. The government machinery's exploitation was stopped;
- Forced labour and ejectments, and other feudal obligation to the Khan's had stopped;
- The party tried to resolve the contradiction between the small owners and the peasants and gradually the small owner was becoming an ally, but his role was still unclear;
- The rural labourers were given a house, cow-dung, some land, and their wages were increased;

*(Iqbal Leghari, "The Socialist Movement in Pakistan – An Historical Survey: 1944 – 74", PhD Thesis, Laval University, Montreal: Canada, 1979 – pp-216-217)*

With the efforts of its motivated workers and enthusiastic leadership in the 1970s, the Hashtnagar movement emerged with new zeal and enthusiasm. In a very short time, this movement extended to districts Peshawar, Mardan, Malakand, Dir, Swat, Bannu, and Kohat. A series of disputes between landlords and tenants were reported in the province, especially in tribal areas such as Dir, Chitral, Swat, and Malakand, in which some serious clashes between the peasants and landlords were reported. In Dir, for example:

*“The dispute relates to Banda in Bind Dara along the foot of hills the petitioner claims that he is owner of the land and that the opposite party are his tenants who used to do Begar for Nawab of Dir and give him (the petitioner) on chicken, two rupees chash, 5 betai wheat per Mutai per annum as Qalang, when beggar was any ‘Qalang’ and asserted claim to ownership. The land involved measures 40 Mutai. He also claims ownership of shamilat of Noor Khel Bala and Noor Khel Payin for which the tenants used to pay Rs. 60 per annum. It is clear that the tenants have been doing Begar and Paying ‘Qalang’ to the landlords. That they are tenants there is no doubt. ‘Qalang’, however, is a remnant of the feudal system and must be abolished”*

*(Report of Dir-Swat: Land Disputes Enquiry Commission, Part 1, Dir, Vol 1, Government of North-West Frontier Province, Home, Tribal Affairs and Local Government Department, Peshawar, 1978)*

This report also describes hundreds of low-level and serious clashes between peasants and landlords on various issues related to tenancy, share crops, eviction from lands and other related problems faced by the peasantry.

### **3.2.4. Punjab**

One of the cornerstones of the peasant organization of Punjab was its long-standing policy of unity between peasants and workers. During 1952, when the re-grouping and restructuring of peasant organizations in Punjab occurring, the Kisan Committees of Punjab were formed; later on, these committees merged with the newly-formed Azad Pakistna Party. The 1960s witnessed the emergence and consolidation of many more political groups and economic classes. The hold of the large landowners may not have been broken in the agricultural sector, but it was certainly shaken enough to allow other economic categories to emerge.

Many of the large landowners had the foresight to read the writing on the wall, and accepted the ‘Green Revolution’ technology package introduced by the government. Although this was an élite farmer strategy (considering the high costs associated with the purchase of tractors, the sinking of tube wells, and other costly ingredients of the package), state subsidization also allowed middle-class farmers to adopt this technology. This was the essence of the Green Revolution: the middle-class and kulak farmers, along with many other farmers at both ends of the economic spectrum, emerged as capitalist farmers, and were soon to become a dominant economic and political force in agriculture and in the country.

Alongside this emerging capitalist farmer was witnessed the genesis of small-scale manufacturers and skilled and technical workers, the growth of an ancillary service sector to service the new economy, as well as a disenfranchised, landless agricultural wage-labour class across rural areas. To some extent, the political ambitions of the newly-emerged agricultural capitalists were accommodated within the ‘Basic Democracies’ scheme of

Ayub Khan, but stopped short of giving them any real political power. This was perhaps the beginning of the apprenticeship of this class of rural politicians, which was to emerge, especially in the Punjab, in the 1970s and was to stamp its mark on the political economy of the country. The military and civilian bureaucrats under Ayub 'had forged a strong political alliance with a number of middle-class urban and rural groups', which helped in fostering economic development and political participation. Moreover, the 'Basic Democracies' system 'not only gave a voice to the middle-class peasantry of Punjab and the NWFP, but also converted Pakistan's powerful civil bureaucracy from an apparatus for maintaining law and order into a remarkable vehicle for promoting development'.

Despite these developments, the peasant's basic problems remained un-checked and ignored by successive governments. The issue of distribution of land remained at the top of the peasants' demands and requirements, particularly in the interior of Sindh and southern Punjab, where land distribution is highly inequitable. Bondage was still rife in agrarian regions, which involves the purchase and sale of peasants among landlords, the maintenance of private jails to discipline and punish peasants, the forcible transference of teachers who train peasants to maintain proper financial accounts, and the systematic rape of peasant women by landlords and the police.

In Punjab in particular, many of the properties left by emigrant landlords were subdivided into smaller plots and redistributed to Muslim refugees. As those farms were often smaller in size and managed by owner cultivators, the need for daily wage labor decreased, resulting in massive rural unemployment.

Unable to finance the rising costs of cultivation, many small- to marginal-owners in the Punjab leased their land to those middle-sized and large landlords who were anxious to enlarge their holdings in order to take full advantage of Pakistan's policy of subsidized farm mechanization. The introduction of tractors and other farm machinery further weakened the power of the landless poor as it resulted in massive unemployment of agricultural day-laborers.

### **3.2.5. Balochistan**

The state of affairs in Balochistan *vis-à-vis* land reforms and agrarian setup holds little differences with the other provinces of Pakistan. The *Jagirdari system* in Balochistan has its own flavor and dominates the society in different ways. About 5 percent of its total land area is suitable for agricultural activity, while the rest is non-agricultural and mostly composed of meadows.

The system of 'Batai' also prevails in this province but with many shapes. The only water supply available through canal system is through the *Pat river feeder*, while rest of the land is dependent on the system of *Kariz*.

The land reforms which the Government set about to introduce after independence were not enacted to end landlordism and give land to the tiller. These land reforms had only very limited objectives, primarily to reform, not to abolish, the old type of feudal landlordism,

by converting the absentee feudal landlords into capitalist landlords by personally supervising cultivation in large farms through farm servants and hired agricultural workers. This new type of landlord thus combines in himself elements of both feudalism and capitalism.

In the decade following the creation of Pakistan, the political power of the very large landlords increased. For example, landlords in their respective provinces won maximum seats in the provincial elections; at the same time, the economic power of the landlords also increased as they imposed revenues and taxes on the poorest farmers, tillers and workers. They also owned more lands than they had before the partition.

*“In all other cases state was cases, the sardar was simply a revenue officer who often got to keep whole part of the revenues of his area in lieu of services rendered. Proprietorship rights belonged either to the state or to the tribe as a whole. The Sardar was not an owner of the lands. It is entirely true that these sardars and their favorites managed to get their names entered into the official records as proprietors for most of these lands during the land settlement of the Ayub era, but it was done through pay-offs and bureaucratic fraud; this bogus, recent proprietorship refers to no historical evidence whatever.”*

*(Focus on Baluchistan, in Pakistan Forum, Ontario, Canada, May- June, 1973)*

During the period of land settlement in the 1960's three important events took place showing the opportunism of the Sardars and their partners. Firstly, alterations in revenue records occurred, in which the names of Sardars were entered as proprietors and the names of cultivators as sharecroppers; in most cases, the names of actual cultivators were omitted altogether from the record. Secondly, the state machinery agreed to let the Sardars convert what used to be state tax into their personal share of the produce in their capacity as landowners, while the state imposed an altogether new tax which was now recognized to be the only form of state tax. Third, the limited land reforms of the Ayub period were not extended to the index of produce units per acre for most of the cultivable land in Balochistan. By these standards, the so-called new proprietors had nothing to worry them, even when confronted with the land reforms of the Bhutto regime. At the rate of four units per acre, with 1,800 units per person already permitted by the land reform, a family of five can keep 22, 500 acres with no further fudging of records needed; those who wish to keep more could always use the services of corruptible bureaucrats.

*“The above mentioned fact is merely a sketch of the legal framework of landholdings in Baluchistan. As should be evident, laws and customs favored the Sardars, Maliks etc. enormously. The increase in taxes imposed by the Sardars, obtain wage-less labour for their own fields, expropriate money, grain, other properties, even women for personal use, in the form of fines which they could impose thanks to their monopoly over adjudicating committees known as ‘Jirgas’. The development of the levies corps, the*

*royal 'Jirga' and the frontier Crimes Regulation, turned these sardars into virtual rulers in their territories."*

### **3.2.6. Masud Khadarposh**

The name of Masud Khadarposh will be remembered for his controversial but very important work which he carried out on behalf of the Haris of Sindh, a report commonly known as the 'Note of Dissent'. During that time, the Sindhi Haris were living in miserable conditions without any conception of social, political or economic rights. They had neither the living standards nor the consciousness of organized socio-economic development. They had no idea how long they would be permitted to stay on the land which they have cultivated for several generations. The fear of losing their land, life and other assets in their hearts always existed:

*"The Hari fears the Zamindar's punishment more than the fear the torture of hell because he frequently sees the Zamindar's 'bully' in action. He knows that any disobedience on the part of the Hari brings on him the wrath of the Zamindar. A brother of a Hari, who had abducted women, was called by the Zamindar to give information regarding him. He denied any knowledge of his whereabouts. The Zamindar did not believe him and ordered his men to hang him upside down from a tree and beat him. So violent was the beating that he became unconscious and was carried home by his younger brother. The Zamindar posted a few watchmen at the house of the injured Hari to see that nobody went out to lodge information with the authorities."*

*(Quoted from "Statement of the Accused, Baba-e-Sindh Hyder Baksh Jatoi: October 7, 1901 – May 21, 1970, edited by Dr. Hatim Jatoi, Baba-e-Sindh Hyder Baksh Jatoi Academy, Hyderabad Pakistan 1997)*

Under these circumstances, Masud Khadarposh presented his note on dissent against the miserable condition of the Haris in Sindh and submitted it to the Sindh government. The document submitted, 'Minute of Dissent', gives a factual description of the conditions under which the producers of Sindh's wealth are compelled to live, stressing the injustice of the zamindari system. It explains that this dispensation is contrary to the laws and traditions of Islam and, having laid out an undisputable case for the abolition of landlordism, stressed that the government should take steps to guarantee the Haris a life suitable for free human beings. Based on the East Bengal Abolition of Zamindari Bill, it further instigated that the overwhelming majority of Pakistan's people desire's a radical change in the present agrarian setup.

*"Just after the partition government of Sindh appointed a committee to find the real fact of the situation and recommend suitable measure for the uplift of Haris and for agrarian reforms in the province. The committee consisted of MLA's, Landlords, and Mr. Masood, I.C.S., now Deputy Commissioner Administrator Karachi"*

*(The Hari Committee Report, Daily Mina Bazar, Karachi, July 01, 1949)*

Mr. Masud's detailed discussion of the issues involved several recommendations, including: that peasant proprietorship should replace that of the zamindari; that the state should be regarded as supreme owner of all land; that holdings above a certain limit should be appropriated; and that leasing of land for cultivation should be prohibited.

*Relating this issue with Quranic point of view, Mr. Masud in his Note of Dissent, Chapter number IV says;*

*“The law of Qoran, regarding the ownership of land is unequivocally in favor of peasant proprietorship. Barring a few exception the precepts of the Qoran in this regard have not been practiced by the Mussalmans throughout the Islamic history. The capitalist classes have interpreted Qoranic law in a way that would suit their interests and would not hamper exploitation which began soon after the demise of the Holy Prophet. Ruthless exploitation has gone on for centuries, in the name of Islam, and it has reached such a stage that the critics of Islam have begun to identify Islam with exploitation. Communists are making capital out of the existing situation and the wave of Communism is shaking the religious ideals of the down-trodden victims of exploitation. They tell the poor man “you have your God, your Prophet and the Qoran and you have your priests, mulvis and the mosque, but how does it all help you to solve the problem of hunger and misery; how does it all help you to come up to the level of respectable human beings. Equality of Islam is all an illusion – it is a trap to keep you under submission.”*

*“Religion, all over the world is facing today the powerful impact of various economic issues and so is Islam in Pakistan. Islam offers a satisfactory solution of all our economic problems, but unfortunately the vested interests among the Mosalmans do not permit a true application of the Islamic principles. The sane and farsighted among Mussalmans fully realize that if the Islamic solution for the present day problems of mass starvation and misery were not adopted, Islam might meet the same fate as befell the religion which flourished in Russia before the revolution. If we failed to enforce the Islamic solution of economic problems, especially that of land, we shall not only endanger the very existence of Pakistan but also the existence of Islam Itself.*

*Qoranic law does not favor the zamindari system – its essence being equitable distribution of land among all genuine cultivators. The Qoran does not permit private property in land of which the real owner is God and through him the state.”*

*(Masud Khadarposh: Note of Dissent, chapter IV)*

He thus proposed the idea that the interest in the land should be restricted to the actual tiller of the soil and the state; he has not, however, dealt with a number of points which must be settled to ensure that any such scheme benefits the cultivators and also helps to improve the standards of agricultural production. The question of compensation is extremely important, for it has been seen that many proposals for the abolition of zamindari, like the East Bengal Bill, suggest such a heavy rate of compensation that no direct benefit is likely to accrue from such schemes to the cultivators, while government will burden itself with a huge debt in an inflationary period. The problem should not be seen from the landlord's point of view, for he has lived on the toil of others for long enough; government's primary concern should be the benefit of the tenants, and should also take the necessary steps to raise production by replacing present methods with modern scientific farming.

Furthermore, in addition to recognizing proprietorship and land reforms for the peasants of Pakistan, Masud, in his 'note on dissent to the Hari Committee Report' stated:

*“Our primary aim should be the creation of a class of independent self-respecting farmers with sufficient land to enable them to accumulate capital and adopt modern ways of agriculture and who would have a desire born of prosperity to better their standards of living. India enjoyed peasant proprietorship both under the Hindu and Muslim rule. For these very reasons it was recommended:*

- a) That Landlordism should be replaced by peasant Proprietorship;*
- b) Occupancy and virtual ownership must go together;*
- c) A person must own land only so long as he occupies (cultivates it personally);*
- d) The leasing of land should be absolutely prohibited;*
- e) For personal cultivation a maximum limit of holding should be prescribed*
- f) In all over land reforms the basic principle viz self cultivation to be condition precedent for ownership was ignored.”*

*(Masud Khadarposh: Abolition of Landlordism and the Sixth Five Year Plan)*

### **3.3. The Edict by Religious Groups**

The committee submitted their findings and recommendations to the government some time last year, but the report was suppressed by the Khuro Ministry, because it really did not offer any relief to the Haris and it contained a controversial note of dissent by Mr. Masud. The suppression of the report aroused much public criticism; on the other hand, the religious class of the country took this report as against the basic ideology and principles of Islam. They criticized Mr. Masud as portraying a negative image of Islam with reference to the land reforms and ownership of land under a *Quranic* and *Hadith* point of view. The government decided to give this note to Maulana Abdul Qadir Badayuni, who migrated from India and was very active in the implementation of an Islamic system in Pakistan. He gave a fatwa (edict) that Masud was no longer a Muslim because he was 'taking the right of God in his hands'; in his view, the owner of land is God and Masud's recommendations

(and use of Quranic verses in support of his report) are a very shocking act. Thus, he must be declared a non-believer.

*“After reading the portion of report thoroughly, which relates Mr. Masud’s reference quoted from Quran and Hadith. With the consent of Ulemas (religious scholars) we seriously pronounce it as against the basic principles of Islam. Mr. Masud in support of concept of collectivity has used the Ayah’s and Quranic Verses in a very vague way, this shows his ineptitude and lack of knowledge about the true spirit of ‘Quran and Hadith’. He should not have correlated the concept of collectivity with the ‘Quran’ and ‘Hadith’.*

*We appreciate Hazarat Alama Badayuni’s evidences and efforts to hold back Mr. Masud’s controversial note. A person who is not aware of the true spirit and fundamental character of the Hadith and Quranic point of view, has no right to become member of such committee.”*

*(Quoted from “Ishteraqiat aur Zarati Musawat”, by Alhaj Hazrat Alama Shah Abdul Hamid, President Sindh Mohajareen Committee and president Jameet-e-Ulema-e-Sindh Pakistan)*

### **3.4. Peasant Organizations**

The background leading to the creation of Pakistan and the domination and control of this ‘part of the region’ by feudal lords and tribal Sardars has already been discussed in previous chapters. The historical development and inception of different organizations has also been discussed. In this section, peasant organizations of the post-partition period will be discussed. Religion has always been the basis of the feudal-tribal system, so from the very beginning Pakistan has been governed by the feudal-military and feudal-political alliance, continuing to the present day. This led to the creation of some peasantry organizations and parties which, in the short spans of democratic rule in the country, emerged due to the strong support of the impoverished masses and peasants in response to the policies of landlords and their allies.

This movement began with the Pakistan Kisan Committee, formed at the same time as the creation of Pakistan; in Punjab, it was known as ‘Punjab Kisan Committee’, in Sindh as “Sindh Hari Committee’, while in NWFP it was known as ‘Sarhad Kisan Jarga’. Peasantry organizations also flourished in East Pakistan as well. In 1948, in a meeting of All-India Kisan Sava, the foundation stone of East Pakistan Kisan Sava was laid down, in which Moni Singh was selected as its president and Mr. Mansur Habibullah as its first General Secretary. The communist party also remained active in supporting the peasantry movement in East Pakistan. Historically, the peasantry movement (and consequently the creation of peasantry organizations) can be divided into two phases: the first phase was dominated by the East Pakistan Kisan Sava, which ended in the early 1950s, while the Karishik Samity, headed by Mulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, took over the charge of peasantry movements in East Pakistan until the creation of Bangladesh.

### **3.4.1. Communist Party of Pakistan**

It was during the Calcutta Congress in 1948 that the Communist Party of Pakistan was established, electing Sajjad Zaheer as its first general secretary. Many prominent Muslim members of the CPI (Communist Party of India) were instructed to work in the CPP (Communist Party of Pakistan) and were sent to Pakistan for that purpose. Though a small party, it was well disciplined and tightly organised. The CPP set up many frontal organisations; among the most prominent was the Progressive Writers Movement, which was headed by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. The party exercised control over the Railway Workers Union (RWU), an organisation that had deep roots with its workers and had played an important role in the struggle against British imperialism. In addition, the student organisation Democratic Students Front, led by party members, had substantial influence in student movements.

Even within the Muslim League (ML) there were progressives, like Mian Ifthikharuddin, who went on to become a minister in the Jinnah cabinet. He belonged to a very rich and influential landlord family of Punjab. Though he was close to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, his sympathies were with the Communist movement. He (amongst others) was asked by the Communist Party to join the Muslim League to exert a progressive influence over it. He set up the Progressive Papers Limited (PPL) which published *The Pakistan Times*. The feudal elements within the Muslim League and Pakistani society as such were arraigned against him.

*“A distressed Ifthikharuddin left the Muslim League and formed the Azad Pakistan Party. Leading figures of the nascent Communist Party of Pakistan were implicated in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, even though no direct evidence could be found against the party or its leaders for attempting to stage a coup to overthrow the regime. Implicated in the case were 12 people including the general secretary of the party Sajjad Zaheer and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. The party was banned and so were its mass organisations. The so-called coup was only in the realm of discussion and was never really attempted. There was a lot of resentment within the Pakistani armed forces over the rightward tilt in Pakistan’s internal and foreign policy. This led to a small group discussing in terms of overthrowing the regime. Following the ban, some CPP members together with Mian Ifthikhar-ud-Din formed the Azad Pakistan Party. In 1957, the Azad Pakistan Party merged with some other so-called liberal progressive groups to form the National Awami Party (NAP-National People’s Party). The Left however was unable to emerge as a significant force in Pakistan politics. But the urge for a Left alternative was very much there amongst the people. The reality on the ground, however, was that the underground pro-Soviet Communist Party of Pakistan and the Workers-Peasants Party known as Mazdoor Kissan Party, a mass political front of the underground pro-Chinese Communist Party, were the formidable political forces in Pakistan under their ideological base and tactics.”*

*(Vijay Singh, in Military Rule in Pakistan, Sun, 14 May 2006)*

### **3.4.2. Mazdoor Kisan Party**

The Mazdoor Kisan party (MKP) also holds special significance in the history of the peasantry struggle in the post-partition era. A communist party created in late 1967, Mazdoor Kisan was borne out of the National Awami Party (NAP) after it split into the factions of Maulana Bhashani and Wali Khan. The leftist members of the NAP, many of whom were active in peasant committees, decided to follow the Wali Khan faction; soon afterwards, however, the leadership of the Wali Khan faction, being landlords, decided to put out a ban on the peasant committees. The leftists, led by Afzal Bangash, decided to leave the NAP altogether rather than shut down the peasant committees and furthermore to form their own party. On 1 May 1968, at a meeting in Peshawar, the Mazdoor Kisan Party was officially formed with Bangash as its leader.

*“The Mazdoor Kisan Party soon started to work together with several factions in Pakistan including the Major Ishaque Mohammad group in Punjab and leftist groups in East Pakistan. In 1970 the Ishaque group merged with MKP. The party's main focus was on the peasantry, inspired by the struggles of the Chinese, Vietnamese and African people. It achieved immediate success in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan, where spontaneous struggles between peasants and landlords were already taking place due to Ayub Khan's land reforms and imposition of farm machinery. The MKP provided the organization and leadership needed by the peasant rebellion and in turn the movement gained tremendous following in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The movement was not only facing the private armies of the landlords but also attempts by the state to stop it by force. The fight continued through three governments: Yahya Khan's military regime, the NAP-JUI government and the provincial government of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Soon even the landlords belonging to the different parties banded together in the Ittehad Party in order to crush the rebellion.”*

*(Quoted from Afzal Bangash Speaks: Class Struggle, Not a Tribal War Pakistan Forum, Vol. 2, No. 9/10 (Jun. - Jul., 1972), pp. 14-18)*

The provincial alliance between National Awami Party and Jamiat-Ulema-Islam (NAP-JUI) stood firmly behind the landlords in these struggles, despite failing to get the central government to establish a ban on the activities of MKP. One of the greatest clashes between the peasantry and the state took place in July 1971 at Mandani. In a day-long pitched battle, an army of 1,500 heavily-armed policemen were routed with a casualty rate of about 20 peasants and party cadres. Another struggle took place at the end of the NAP-JUI government period, with around 8,000 militia and Rangers deployed to the Malakand Agency in order to stop the MKP. During this time the party's vice-president Maulvi Mohammad Sadiq was assassinated. Up until the 1970s the MKP had strong support amongst the peasantry of Peshawar and Mardan districts, the Malakand Agency and the

former states of Swat and Dir. It also built support in parts of Hazara and Punjab. The MKP did not participate in the general elections of 1977; they organized mass rallies with the slogan '*revolution, not elections*', attracting around 50,000 people in Peshawar and 30,000 in Shergarh, demonstrating its strong grass-root support among the masses. After the 1977 elections the MKP witnessed some serious challenges, when a number of leftist parties in Pakistan formed a coalition by the name of Awami Jamhoori Ittehad (People's Democratic Alliance). The MKP, having increasing internal differences, did not join this alliance. The internal differences mainly revolved around the question of the peasant movement in NWFP. The three disagreeing factions in the MKP were personified by Sher Ali Bacha, Afzal Bangash, Imtiaz Alam, and Major Ishaque.

Finally in 1978, the MKP formally split up into three factions: one led by Bangash, taking most of the NWFP organization and the party in northern Punjab. A second, led by Sher Ali and Imtiaz, taking most of the cadres in Punjab and Karachi and a small number in NWFP (Sher Ali later separated himself from this faction, forming the Pukhtoonkhwa Mazdoor Kissan Party). And finally a third led by Major Ishaque, which was supported by a small number of the party's old guard in Punjab and a small amount of cadres from Karachi. Of these three factions, the one led by Afzal Bangash soon came to be recognized by the public as the MKP.

### **3.4.3. Sindh Hari Committee**

The role of the Sindh Hari Committee (SHC) is also very important in the history of human struggle for the rights of peasantry and land reforms, and remains very active in projecting the true demands of poor Haris in Sindh. From bonded labor to the eviction of land, from the zamindari system to unjustified government policies, the problems it faces have deep roots in the history of the sub-continent.

The abolition of zamindars is no longer a question of mere theoretical or academic interest; zamindari has actually been abolished in large areas of the world, and with many benefits to the common man and to the cause of social development. But in Pakistan, even after partition, the roots of the zamindari system are getting stronger and stronger.

In the Annual Conference of the Sindh Hari Committee in Hyderabad on December 1955, a resolution was passed to counter these trends. The summary of the resolution is as follows;

*"If the vested interests inside and outside Government are too strong yet to permit Zamindari to be abolished with or without compensation, this council makes the following modest demands for Government's immediate implementation:-*

- a) Security of tenancy rights should be guaranteed to all peasants of Pakistan (by and entry in the Record of Rights) and their arbitrary eviction by Zamindars legally prohibited.*

- b) *Batai system should be replaced by a fair cash rental system, the peasants to pay the rental through government agency along with the land assessment*
- c) *Till the 'Batai' system is abolished, the Haris' share should be 60 percent of the gross produce, and no deduction should be made from this share*
- d) *All forms of free or forced labor exacted from the peasants by the Zamindars must be stopped, and all available Government machinery must be applied to the problem.*
- e) *An effective all embracing Tenancy Law must be passed immediately, even by an ordinance, incorporating the above means."*

### 3.5. Agrarian Classes

*"Of Pakistan's four provinces, Sindh is one of the poorest. It has a population of 30 million, of whom 20 million live in the rural areas. The majority of the people of Sindh depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Land distribution in rural Sindh is severely skewed. Big land owners or Zamindars form only 6% of the farmer community but own 44% of the land. Most of the farmer communities, approximately 80%, constitute Haris, or agricultural laborers, men and women, who do not own any land. To make a living, these Haris cultivate the lands of landowners as sharecroppers, traditionally sharing the harvest 50/ 50 with the Zamindars. Some more oppressive Zamindars give the Haris only 25% of their harvest. When it comes to selling their share, Haris have to sell at a price determined by the Zamindar. All of this results in meagre sustenance for the Haris. In fact, their income is so low that they have to borrow heavily from the Zamindars to meet the costs of cultivation such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides etc."*

*(Quoted from International Development and Refugee Foundation (IDRF) Report on, [www.idrf.ca](http://www.idrf.ca))*

In Pakistan peasants are mostly small farmers, including tenants (both on government and private lands) and agricultural laborers. The peasants are generally socially and culturally separate from the dominant elite class. In Pakistan the agrarian sector is divided into different classes, which may be divided into five different categories:

#### 3.5.1. Zamindars (Landlords)

Zamindars are those who control huge landed properties and divide it among a number of small peasants, workers on 'Betai'. Also known as *talukdars* or *jagirdars*, these landholders held considerable sway within their territories, including powers of recruitment, revenue collection and taxation, and magisterial authority, amongst others. The size of the Jagirs (land) and the population within them were often larger than those of many princely states. Several families are of very ancient lineage and had been independent rulers at earlier periods of history. The hereditary and personal titles conferred

on the heads of these families were almost indistinguishable from those held by the ruling families. The zamindars are also of two types, namely the resident and absentee. They possess their holdings as a result of inheritance, and augment them by the seizure of land parcels that were historically common property. The power of landlords within their land is thus linked with their brutal policies. Throughout history feudalism has appeared in different forms. The feudal prototype in Pakistan consists of landlords with large joint families possessing hundreds or even thousands of acres of land. They seldom make any direct contribution to agricultural production. Instead, all work is done by peasants or tenants who live at subsistence level, for centuries cultivating their lands and getting very little in return. The fruits of the labour of the direct producer are not controlled by the direct producer but rather by the dominant landlord class.

The landlord, by virtue of his ownership and control of such vast amounts of land and human resources, is powerful enough to influence the distribution of water, fertilizers, tractor permits and agricultural credit and, consequently exercises considerable influence over the revenue, policing and judicial administration of the area. The landlord is thus complete lord and master. Such absolute power can easily corrupt, and it is no wonder that the feudal system shows many examples of human degradation.

### **3.5.2. Capitalist Farmers (Rich Farmers)**

The capitalist farmers are those who have their own piece of land or are capable of purchasing their own land for agricultural production and activity. In the majority of these cases, most of the land is owned by the capitalist farmer, while rest of the portion of land is hired on tenancy or contract basis. They usually hire poor landless workers and peasants to work for them on very low wages, while reaping maximum fruits of their productivity. The capitalist-class of farmers has always held a very significant role in the agriculture sector of Pakistan. They work on their lands in a very organized manner, involving the distribution and share of crops between the tillers and the owner, the exploration of new means for cultivation, and other agricultural needs.

### **3.5.3. Family Farmers (Middle or Poor Peasants)**

*“This class of the farmers is composed of family who basically own the land or possesses the land tenure-ship for their living. Some times, they even give some portion of their landed property on tenancy to the other farmers or tillers. For the purpose of cultivation and harvesting in their land, they usually rely on their household support, and the whole family is involved in the agricultural activities. They do not hire the workers or farmers for this reason.”*

*(Quoted from, Mehmood Hassan, “Pakistan Ka Zarai Dhanca Aur Tabkat”, Research Forum Publications)*

### 3.5.4. Sharecroppers

A sharecropper normally survives on hired lands for the cultivation of crops and other agrarian purposes, and in return the owner of the land gets his due share in traditional ways, in the form of a share in the crops or by other means. This category also includes the poor land owners, who for an increase in their income hire out small pieces of land.

Feudal systems of land tenure are prevalent in large parts of Pakistan; it can be said to be the dominating feature of class relations. In some parts of Pakistan, the subsistence-level small holder is the chief agricultural property owner.

*“As a consequence of Pakistan’s extreme land ownership inequality, the fraction of tenanted land is high (more than a third), and about two-thirds of this land is under sharecropping. Despite numerous tenancy laws on the books (regarding eviction and the sharing of output and costs), contracts are de facto unconstrained, as enforcement is practically nonexistent.*

*Sharecropping is the predominant form of tenancy in Sindh province, where the land ownership distribution is particularly skewed. According to reports by surveyed tenants, the median landlord owns 28 acres, whereas nearly 80% of the share-tenants are landless farmers. Large landlords in this region often employ labor supervisors (kamdars) to manage their many tenants. In the Punjab, the second of the major provinces of Pakistan, tenancies are split more evenly between share and fixed rent contracts. Landlords in Punjab are also typically much smaller than in Sindh, with median holdings of only 7 acres, and are more likely to be resident in the same village as their tenants.”*

*(Quoted from, (Hanan G. Jacoby and Ghazala Mansuri, Incentives, Supervision and sharecropper, productivity, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4125, February 2007)*

### 3.5.5. Wage Workers

This category of peasants is composed of poor wage workers who sell their services for their living. This category of poor farmers does not own any land property, but are dependent upon the lands of Zamindars or capitalist farmers. They cultivate the lands for them and in return get their share in the shape of money, share of crops or sometimes in kind. Their living condition is directly dependent on the work and land available for cultivation from the land owner. In a system where self-cultivation has become very common and is carried out by tractor on larger farms, the landlords tend to hire sharecroppers in place of permanent tenants. This change is obscured by the fact that the cultivator is still called a poor wage worker or Hari, and he may still be registered as a tenant.

*“After a detailed survey on the agrarian classes in Pakistan it is revealed that, in NWFP and Punjab the role of capitalist class is very prominent, while in Sindh the ratio of peasants who work on ‘Betai’ is comparatively low. The ratio of capitalist farmers in Punjab is higher. In Pakistan there are three basic classes, .i.e. Jagirdari, Kisan and emerging capitalist class.”*

*(Quoted from, Mehmood Hassan, “Pakistan Ka Zarai Dhancha Aur Tabkat”, Research Forum Publications)*

### **3.6. Kisan Conferences**

In this depressing situation created by government, the rule of waderaism and jagirdari nizam across the country helped develop a sense of rebellion among the peasantry class; in response to this sense of oppression (as mentioned earlier), an organized struggle began which resulted in the creation of different organizations for furthering their cause and agenda. These organizations strove to bring awareness and mobilization to the peasantry (along with other working classes) through speeches, gatherings and conferences. In previous chapters we go into comprehensive detail regarding the inception and creation of these associations and their subsequent conferences; in this particular chapter, we will be dealing with the conferences organized by the peasantry organizations after partition and the creation of Pakistan.

In order to chart the journey of the Kisan conferences it is very important to first discuss those conferences held in former East Pakistan; under the leadership of Moni Singh and his comrade Mansur Habibullah, the first conference of East Pakistan Kisan Sava (already discussed in previous sections) was convened at Lalmonirhat in Gangpur district, and was attended by delegates from all the districts of East Bengal. This conference lasted for three days, and was organized under great secrecy because of the fear of ban from the government.

*“The conference lasted for three days, and a number of resolutions were adopted. The basic policy resolution was:  
The Muslim league government led by the nawabs and zamindars would never abolish the zamindari system without pressure from outside. So in the predominantly agricultural country, the peasants will have to be organized and the waves of mass movement will have to be raised to great heights so that it may spread all over east Bengal.”*

*(Quoted from, Badruddin Umar, “The Emergence of Bangladesh: Class Struggles in East Pakistan (1947 -1958), Oxford University Press, 2004)*

During 1948, the main objective of the Kisan Sava was the abolition of the Zamindari system in East Pakistan. To achieve this objective the workers and leadership of the organization remained very active in organizing different meetings and conferences. In July 1948, at Karmgunj Bazaar of Kishoregung sub division, Kisan Sava organized a meeting; witnessing this move by the peasantry organization, the government promulgated

section 144 in the area, but the Kisan Sava (Krishat Samity Bengali) decided to hold its meeting nonetheless, resulting in the eruption of fierce fighting between workers and police. On 28 January 1949, a meeting of about 5000 peasants was held in a field in front of the Lengura police camp. Peasants from far-off places joined the meeting and adopted several resolutions for the abolition of the Zamindari system without compensation and for the abolition of the tonko system, and for the participation of local peasant committees in the collection of government revenues and taxes and the procurement of food grains.

This resolution was sent to the government in writing and the Hindu-Muslim peasants of the entire Mymensingh district gathered in a similar meeting in Jashodal to press for the same demands. Such meetings were organized on a smaller scale in many other areas by the peasants.

*“However, in spite of determined and strong movements in certain areas, an extensive peasant’s movement could not be organized. This was primarily because the Kisan Sava, instead of organizing the peasants on the basis of actual problems faced by them, raised the political slogans of overthrowing the Pakistan state and concentrated its activities in certain pockets areas only.”*

In West Pakistan, the first Kisan Conference was held under the leadership of the communist party of Pakistan. Soon after the creation of Pakistan in late 1947, the communist party organized its efforts and started to make contacts and linkages with its workers in all Pakistan’s provinces (including East Pakistan). They carried out several different conferences during December 1947 in Punjab, Sindh, and the Frontier provinces, during which time Dada Feroz-u-din proposed the idea of re-structuring and re-organizing the peasantry organizations. As a result of this, the first Kisan Conference was organized in March 1948 and held in Tehsil Toba Tek Singh of District Loyalpur.

The key points of the agenda of this conference were:

- Feudalism must be eliminated;
- Extra fines and taxes must be stopped;
- Crops should be distributed on 50 – 50 basis;
- Eviction of tenants should be stopped.

In this conference, the Punjab Kisan Committee was re-organized and founded, attracting peasants from rural and urban areas all across the province. In addition to the above points, it was also decided that committees should be formed at district levels, thereby giving a new dimension to the peasantry movement in Punjab; these district-level committees were formed in different parts of Punjab. Local peasantry organizations organized their efforts in order to combat the ‘Batai’ and illegal taxes, and meetings and conferences were arranged to discuss these issues and to decide a concrete framework for the abolition of these practices. This proved to be very significant, resulting in their insistence that the share of Batai should be distributed among landlords and peasants in the fields and on equal terms. While observing that the landlords would not agree with this proposal, the peasants

nonetheless collected their share, leaving the share of landlords' right in the middle of their grain fields.

*“This movement extended throughout the provinces very quickly and speeded to Multan, Muzafargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan, Minawali and other districts. Witnessing this, the landlords started to expel the peasants from their lands, which led to series of fight between the landlords and peasants, resulted in furious clashes and detention of workers and party leadership. Despite of all these oppression, the authorities failed to stop this movement and finally the first land reforms regarding eviction of peasants by the landlords was introduced in May 2, 1950, envisaging, peasants will only be evicted in case of violation of prescribed terms and conditions set forth.”*

*(Quoted from Report on “Agricultural problems of Pakistan and Peasantry movement”, By Chaudary Fateh Mohammad during party conference on February 2, 1975: Socialist Party Publications, number 3, Peshawar)*

During the same time period and in the wake of the volatile situation created by the land reforms, the Kisan Committee, recognizing the need for permanent settlement of peasant refugees, took note of the way in which the current state of affairs was affecting the committee itself. For this reason, on 14-15 July 1952, a meeting of revolutionary peasant workers was convened. During the meeting the forthcoming agenda was discussed and decisions regarding the convening of the Punjab Kisan Conference in Gujranwala district in September were decided.

Like previous conferences, this one succeeded in attracting hundreds of peasants from all across the provincial rural areas. A broad range of issues related to the peasants were discussed, such as those related to the eviction of peasants, the implementation of land reforms, the elimination of temporary settlements, and the allotment of lands to migrated peasants.

Following these events the political struggle between different political parties reached to new heights as the election of 1958 approached. Peasant's organizations also concentrated efforts to raise their voices to the national level, and were convinced that the in-coming government would bring introduce some changes to their advantage; as it happened, things were not so different from the past. Despite this setback, peasants' conferences and conventions continued to be held in different parts of country; in 1962, a Kisan Convention was held in front of the first elected assembly, where peasants staged a huge demonstration in favor of the allotment of available lands. Two similar conventions took place in 1963 in Khanewal and in 1966 in Multan. These two conferences also hold significance in terms of strengthening the Kisan Committees at more local levels, forming committees at provincial- and district-level. Conferences were again held in different parts of Punjab in 1970 in Toba Tek Singh, and in 1971 at Khanewal.

Peasantry organizations within NWFP were also very active in holding meetings and processions throughout the province. Many conferences were held throughout the 1960s

and 1970s, from which demands for the rights of peasants were projected through mass agitations, processions, and sometimes armed struggle. The objective of these gatherings and meetings was always the same: to promote the cause of the peasantry movement and to mobilize mass support to achieve its realization. On September 8, 1967, a meeting of delegates of the West Pakistan Committee was held in Lahore, which included participants from NWFP, Balochistan and Sindh. In April 1967, in village Shah Abad, district Peshawar, a Kisan Jirga conference was held in which a joint resolution regarding the occupation of land by the Khans and their unjustified eviction of peasants was passed.

*(Quoted from Chaudhry Fateh Mohammad's, "Report on Pakistan's Agricultural Problems and Peasants' Movement, in Socialist Party Publication number 3, Maktaba-e-Afkar-e-Nou, Peshawar, 1975)*

### **3.6.1. Mazdoor Kisan Party Conference: NWFP**

The first national congress of the party was held in May 1973 at Shergarh in the Mardan District. Armed security guards were placed around the area, and a strike of bus owners was set off in order to prevent people from attending. This failed however, as 5,000 delegates, helped by disobedient drivers and MKP militants, managed to attend the congress. An energetic debate took place, during which Ishaque Mohammad was elected as president of the party with Sher Ali Bacha as General Secretary. Following this conference, on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1974, a conference was organized in Peshawar by the Kisan Committee; this was also a big success in terms of mobilizing the masses in the far-flung rural areas of NWFP.

Another conference was held in Sukrand, with a variety of participants, including the National Awami Party, Democratic Women Association, Democratic Student Federation, West Pakistan Labor Federation, Sindh Hari Committee, Kisan Committee and Kisan Jirga. The participants presented the idea of limitations on land-related issues and also demanded the exemption of Malaya. By 1970 the idea of collective farming had reached its maturity and was receiving massive support from the general public.

Various other organizations and splinter groups also emerged after partition alongside these important peasantry organizations. One such group was the Anjuman Mozareen Punjab AMP (Association of Tenants), which fought for land rights concerning military farms at Okara, Lahore, Renala Khurd and Depalpur. They brought over a thousand peasants to the conference. The Labour Qaumi Movement of power loom workers in Faisalabad was another, bringing hundreds. Another tenants' organization from Lahore, the Ghareeb Itihad Anjuman Shamsia, also took part, as well as the Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union, the Pakistan Kissan Committee, the Pakistan Ghareeb Kissan Tehreek (Pakistan Poor Peasants Movement), Pakistan Kissan Itihad (Pakistan Peasants Unity), Sindh Hari Tehreek, Women Workers' Help Line, the National Trade Union Federation, the Pakistan Workers Confederation and many other workers', peasants' and social groups.

The Sindh Hari Committee also left no stone unturned in terms of their massive support to the peasants' struggle. Motivational leadership and a strong base of support amongst the masses led to an organized and mobilized movement across their province culminating in 1965, when the Sindh Hari Committee's divisional two-day conference was organized in village Madihi, District Sakur.

*“This conference was presided by the Molvi Nazir Hussain Jatoi. Along with its comrade members, Mr. Major retired Ishaque Mohammad, the deputy convener of Sindh Kisan committee West Pakistan and other prominent workers like, general secretary Ghulam Mohammad Khan Leghari, Alam Zeb Zafar, Qazi Faiz Ahmad Advocate, Syed Baqar Shah Advocate, Mr. Azizullah, Mr. Barkat Ali Azad, Mr. Abd-ur-Rehman, Mr. Abdul Qadir, Mr. Shaoor Siddiqui and Mr. Zameer Ahmad were present.”*

*(Daily Afaq Lahore, 5 March 1965)*

This was part of a series of conferences convened in Sindh in which thousands of peasants participated. On 21-22 June 1970, a historic Sakrand Hari Conference in village Sakrand, district Nawab Shah was organized by the Sindh Hari Committee. This conference was headed by Shiekh Abdul Majeed Sindhi; significantly, peasants from across the district and province travelled to attend this conference, many barefoot, for many kilometers.

*“Among these different workers of National Awami Party, and peasants started their journey from Karachi, crossing through, Suajawa, Thatta, Hyderabad, Mitiari, Hala, Saeedabad and entered into Sakrand after covering 234 kilometer long barefooted journey. While addressing the conference session, Mr. Shiekh Abdul Majeed in his presidential speech said, ‘This conference is representative forum of all the peasants of the province, this is the conference of workers and peasants of the province. Our struggle is merely not confined to the one unit system but rather, it is against the brutal policies and control of the Landlords as well. It is the peasant who has claim over the lands of Sindh not the Landlords, they must ensure their dominance and claim over their lands. It is also necessary to build strong base and organizational layout at every village of Sindh.’”*

In this conference different resolutions were adopted, such as:

1. Equitable distribution of land among the tillers and Haris;
2. Elimination of Begar and other illegal such acts;
3. Ensuring Hari's share in Betai not less than 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of total;
4. Provision of seeds and urea on easy installments and terms and banks must ensure loans for the poor Haris;
5. Government must directly purchase the cotton from tillers and then sell it to the traders;
6. Introduction of new technology and scientific support in agriculture;
7. Reformation of the existing Agriculture Department on new grounds;
8. Complete and comprehensive framework for the peasants;

9. Allocation of due share of Haris on river waters and barrage;
10. Increase in development of Agriculture colleges in the Sindh;
11. Land reforms and laws for the Haris and;
12. Protection of basic human rights of peasants in Sindh.

*(Sakrand Conference, Weekly Lail-o-Nehar, Karachi, 19 July, 1970)*

### **3.7. Land Reforms: Historical Overview**

Pakistan is a country with a great many small-scale farms and a small number of very large estates. After the partition of Pakistan, distribution of landownership was in very bad shape; most of the land or agricultural areas were under the control of landlords, who contributed little to production but extracted as much as possible from the sharecroppers farming the land. Approximately 50 percent of all farmland was cultivated by tenants, including sharecroppers, most of whom had little security and few rights. An additional large number of landless rural inhabitants worked as agricultural laborers. Farm laborers and many tenants were extremely poor, uneducated, and malnourished, in sharp contrast to the wealth, status, and political power of the landed elite.

*“Land Reform generally means lowering the upper ceiling of privately-owned land and distributing the excess land thus appropriated among landless peasants, with or without compensation to the dispossessed landowners. The proponents of re-distributive land reform consider it a remedy for all social, economic and political evils in a society.”*

*(Quoted from Mazhar Hussain Arif’s, “Equitable Land Reforms in Pakistan”, a network publication, September 2004)*

According to Akbar Zaidi, Pakistan has had a long and varied of history of land reforms. Most attempts have been without any serious purpose, and most of them have failed.<sup>18</sup> The land reforms Regulation of 1972 explains the objectives of reforms as follows:

*“Whereas Islam enjoins equitable distribution of wealth and economic power and abhors their concentration in a few hands; and whereas it is in the supreme national interest to improve the economic well-being of the peasantry, by making agriculture a profitable vocational now therefore the Chief Martial law Administrator is pleased to make the following regulations.”*

*(Gazette of Pakistan, Extraordinary, March 11, 1972)*

### **3.8. Land Reforms: West versus East Pakistan**

With regard to land reforms, the first step was taken by the Muslim League government in East Pakistan by passing the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act in 1950; with

<sup>18</sup> Zaidi S. Akbar, Issue in Pakistan’s economy, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000 p. 27

one radical step, the ceiling of land holding was fixed at just 33 acres and tenants were given security of tenure, while sub-letting and the practice of absentee landlordism were forbidden.

During that particular time period (the early 1950s), provincial governments attempted to abolish some of the truant landlords or rent collectors, but had little success in the face of strong opposition. Security of tenancy was also legislated in the provinces, but because of their dependent position, tenant farmers benefited only slightly. In fact, the reforms created an atmosphere of uncertainty in the countryside and intensified the animosity between wealthy landlords and small farmers and sharecroppers.

The planning commission, in its document ‘The First Five Years Plan (1956-60)’, commented on this measure by the Government of East Bengal and the need for similar reforms in West Pakistan:

*“In this country, East Pakistan has placed a radical measure of reform on its statute book, though it has not yet been fully implemented. It seeks to abolish the institution of land lordship, and assure to the tenants full rights of inheritance and transfer. The recent constitutional changes resulting in the merger of the various provinces and States in the Western Wing of the country into one Unit, afford an excellent opportunity for giving uniform basis to the variety of tenancy laws and similar legislation in this areas. This administrative change has raised new hopes in the country, including those for land reforms. We hope that West Pakistan Government will give this problem the priority it deserves.”*

*(Extract from First Five Years Plan (1956-60), Government of Pakistan, Karachi)*

The report further reiterated and emphasized that the problem of land reform is fundamental to all development. Nearly 90 percent of the people live in rural areas; about 75 percent of them depend on agriculture, and about 60 percent of the national income is derived from agriculture. The economic and social status of this overwhelming part of the population must be raised if an independent Pakistan in the modern age is to have any meaning for them.

The pious hope entertained by the planning commission that the government of West Pakistan would follow the example set by the government of East Pakistan was never fulfilled. What transpired was that the West Pakistan Land Reform Commission in its 1959 Report recommended a ceiling of 500 acres of irrigated land. In addition, so many exemptions were incorporated into the report that the purpose of the reforms was entirely defeated. This goes to the credit of the then-Finance Minister, Mr. Ghulam Ishaque Khan, who dissented on ceilings and related issues.

Another surprising feature of this report was that it made no mention or reference to the almost revolutionary land reforms already introduced in one part of the country, summing up to a conspiracy of silence over a major legislative measure introduced in former East

Pakistan. Secondly, the commission totally ignored the recommendation made in the First Plan. These two important omissions established that the feudal rulers of Pakistan were determined to maintain their hold over the resources of the country. Their influence was such that they turned Ayub Khan and his senior officers (both civil and military) into landlords.

The feudal lords were now faced with a challenge of survival and therefore welcomed the military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan, as opposed to the Constitution in which they found no safety. But a serious contradiction, which had been cemented in the political setup of the country by virtue of the glaring disparity in land ownership patterns between the Eastern and Western wings, had laid the foundation for the disintegration of Pakistan.

In January 1959, by accepting the recommendations of a special commission on the subject, General Mohammad Ayub Khan's government issued new land reform regulations that aimed to boost agricultural output, promote social justice, and ensure security of tenure. Under these reforms, a ceiling of about 200 hectares of irrigated land and 400 hectares of non-irrigated land was placed on individual ownership; compensation was paid to owners for land surrendered. Numerous exemptions, including title transfers to family members, limited the impact of the ceilings; as a result, slightly less than 1 million hectares of land were surrendered, of which a little more than 250,000 hectares were sold to about 50,000 tenants. The land reform regulations made no serious attempt to break up large estates or to lessen the power or privileges of the landed elite. However, the measures attempted to provide some security of tenure to tenants and to consolidate existing holdings, preventing further fragmentation of farm plots. An average holding of about five hectares was considered necessary for a family's subsistence, and a holding of about twenty to twenty-five hectares was pronounced as a desirable "economic" holding.

In Pakistan, land reform has faced the dilemma of politicization for political motives rather than strengthening the socio-economic situation. From the very beginning, land reforms have been introduced because of political expedience, in the wake of either the 'communist threat' or domestic political needs.

Under these circumstances the peasantry found it increasingly difficult to survive, while millions of acres of state land were distributed among the ruling elites, landlords, military personnel, and other influential or potential supporters. This pattern of selective allotment to the elite is not a new phenomenon, as it has existed as far back as the British colonial period. The government of Pakistan, since its inception, served only to rigorously perpetuate this policy.

The second development in land reforms in Pakistan begins with the introduction of land reforms by the Bhutto government in March 1972, furthering previous land reform measures, and went into effect in 1973. The land-ownership ceiling was officially lowered to about five hectares of irrigated land and about twelve hectares of non-irrigated land; exceptions were in theory limited to an additional 20 percent of land for owners having tractors and tube wells. The ceiling could also be extended for ownership of poor-quality

land. Owners of expropriated excess land received no compensation, and beneficiaries were not charged for the land distributed.

*“The 1972 land reforms were introduced in the name of Islam as ‘Islamic injunctions abhor concentration of wealth and economic power in few hands’. However, in 1989, the Federal Shariat Court declared land reforms un-Islamic, which again points to lack of clarity of successive government and state institutions concerning land reforms. Though the land lowered the landholding ceilings, they had little re-distributive effects in rural areas. Commenting on the implementation of the 1972 land reforms, Zaidi says that as the resumed land was far less than in 1959, only 50,548 persons benefited from the redistribution of 308,390 acres from 1972-78. Only 1 percent of land-less tenants and small owners benefited from these measures. On the land resumed in 1959, some 6 percent still needs to be distributed even after 38 years, and 39 percent of the area resumed under the 1972 reforms is still held by the government, despite the presence of a large number of landless cultivators.”*

*(Gazette of Pakistan, Extraordinary, March 11, 1972)*

In 1973 some procedures were introduced requiring landlords to pay all taxes, water charges, seed costs, and one-half of the cost of fertilizer and other inputs. It prohibited eviction of tenants as long as they cultivated the land, and it gave tenants first rights of purchase. Other regulations increased tenants' security of tenure and prescribed lower rent rates than had ever previously existed. These events made landlords extremely fearful, and they started evicting the tenants from their lands and turned to self-cultivation by hiring agricultural laborers; this was especially prevalent in southern Punjab and the interior of Sindh. As a result of this, tenants, largely in Punjab and NWFP, evicted from the lands that they had tilled since decades, lost almost everything, including their jobs, shelter, and social and material assets in the shape of livestock.

*“On 18<sup>th</sup> December 1976, people’s government issued a National Charter for the Peasants took a bold step about the distribution of state land among landless tenants and poor peasants owning less than subsistence holdings. A National Charter for the Peasants was issued, whereby, in addition to conferring proprietary rights of the land on the occupancy tenants and grantees of state land, it was declared that all culturable state land including Katcha Lands of Sindh will be distributed with full ownership rights among peasants who either own no land or own less than subsistence holdings, and in no case state land will be auctioned or given on lease in large tracts. According to an estimate 50,23,165 acres of culturable state land was then readily available for the purpose in addition to Katcha Lands of Sindh. Here also the provincial governments whose duty it was to distribute the same dillydallied for ulterior motive. The big land lords were required to give up possession of large tracts of state and Katcha Land illegally occupied by them. It will be proper to quote here the remarks of*

*Bhutto, which shows his deep urge for the welfare of the peasantry, in the following terms: All powers to the peasants.”*

*(Quoted from “Land Reforms: The Dawn of a New Era under Clouds of Martial Law”, by Shiekh Muhammad Rashid, Ex-Minister of Land Reforms and Chairman, Federal Land Commissioner)*

The third intervention in land reforms in Pakistan started in late 1970s. In 1977, the Bhutto government further reduced ceilings on private ownership of farmland to about four hectares of irrigated land and about eight hectares of non-irrigated land. In an additional measure, agricultural income became taxable, although small farmers owning ten hectares or fewer--the majority of the farm populations--were exempted. The military regime of Zia ul-Haq that ousted Bhutto neglected to implement these latter reforms.

*“After Zia’s Martial Law, the land reforms introduced by Z.A. Bhutto in 1977 could not be implemented. During the past one and a half decade, with the introduction of the concept of privatization and with the fading away of socialist ideology, the concept of land reforms disappeared gradually from the scene. In 1989 the Federal Shariat Court declared land reforms un-Islamic, which almost completely blocked the way of further reforms.”*

*Quoted from Mazhar Hussain Arif’s, “Equitable Land Reforms in Pakistan”, A network publication, September 2004)*

As a concluding analysis, nationalization caused colossal loss not only to the national treasury but also to the people of Pakistan. These important land reforms included the reduction of land ceilings and introduced the notion of security of tenancy to tenant farmers. The land ceiling was fixed to 150 acres of irrigated land and 300 acres of non-irrigated land. Another step that Bhutto took was to democratize Pakistan's Civil Service.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, feudal families retained control over national affairs through the bureaucracy and its close relation with the armed forces. Governments in the 1980s and early 1990s avoided significant land reform measures, perhaps because they drew much of their support from landowners in the countryside. Today in Pakistan land ownership still remains highly concentrated; more than half of the country's total farm land is in farms of fifty acres or more.

Although meaningful land reforms in Pakistan may be difficult to implement, especially given the current feudal structure of power in the country, it is still necessary to work towards reforms that will work. The key is solving the issue of how to implement reforms by a body other than the landowning classes, who see these changes as detrimental to them and has a history of attempting to circumvent the process.

Land policy, land rights and land reform have always remained important factors to economic development and poverty reduction in both rural and urban areas of Pakistan. But land issues are often complex and lack the necessary political will to handle the

situation. In Pakistan, land ownership remains highly distorted, especially in a situation where the agricultural class is dominated by landlords, land ownership is highly unequal, and agricultural growth delivers fewer benefits for the poor as profits are taken away from the rural economy. Contrary to popular belief, small farms are often more productive than larger estates.

The case for land reforms and, more broadly, agrarian reforms, is premised on the need to create sustainable livelihoods, widely agreed to be the most effective method of alleviating poverty. In addition, land reform combats social injustice while achieving sustained economic growth. Land ownership in Pakistan is highly concentrated, and in the one province (NWFP) for which data is available from the Federal Land Commission, this concentration has increased between 1980 and 1990. More recent data (not available to researchers) is needed from the Land Commission to update these findings for all the provinces. Land reforms that are based on specifying a ceiling on individual land holdings create the opportunity to distribute land to landless laborers and tenant farmers. However, without a strong support network of agrarian reforms, the redistribution of land per sector may not create the desired sustainable livelihoods.

*“The story of the land reforms will remain incomplete without mention of what has been achieved in the areas of former states of Dir, Swat and Chitral. A commission known as the Land Dispute Inquiry commission had been set up by the Provincial Government of NWFP, to enquire into the agrarian problems in these areas, especially disputes between;*

- 1. Tenants and ex-rulers of the former states or their heirs;*
- 2. the small owners ousted by force by the ex-rulers or their heirs;*
- 3. Landlords and tenants.*

*A large number of tenants were settled with ownership rights, on the lands withdrawn from the ex-rulers, princes and big landlords. The recommendation of commission and the decision of the Government taken thereon were mostly in favor of ex-rulers. The F.L.C., in exercise of its suo moto power interfered to rectify the wrong done to the rightful claimants. Approximately two lakh acres of land, held by the cultivators of Dir had been withdrawn from the ex-ruler prince and other big landlords and full ownership right given to occupant tillers of the soil. About thirty thousand families of small owners ousted mercilessly by the ex-rulers of Swat in their hey-day, were rehabilitated on their holdings. In Chitral also a large number of tenants were settled with ownership rights, on the land withdrawn from the ex-ruler and the princes. The land being un-surveyed the ex-ruler of Swat managed to retain land much more than his entitlement under the land Reforms Act. The F.L.C., sent survey teams, who, in spite of extreme cold weather, did carry out survey and measurement of the mountainous region, earmarked the land according to his entitlement and withdrew the surplus which was distributed among the deserving tenants. This uphill task was also accompanied by the federal government although*

*it was the duty of the provincial government to supervise the implementation.”*

*(Quoted from “Land Reforms: The Dawn of a New Era under Clouds of Martial Law”, by Shiekh Muhammad Rashid, Ex-Minister of Land Reforms and Chairman, Federal Land Commissioner p. 435)*

Agrarian reforms are also called for because over the last 56 years the trend has been and remains that of a rapid increase in the number of small farms as a portion of total farms. Data on operational holdings (size of farms) suggests that land has become much more fragmented, and between 1990 and 1999, there was an increase in total farm sizes below 12.5 acres from 81 percent to 88 percent of the total land cultivated. Just over half of all farms in 1999 were less than five acres in size.

As land becomes more fragmented, large landlords, who have the requisite liquidity, can add to their holdings. Thus the agenda for the state is to both ensure a fair distribution of land holdings and also to ensure broader agrarian reforms to make certain that small farm cultivation is both just (if under tenancy contract) and sustainable (if under self-cultivation).

The case for land reform is very strong, particularly on the broader grounds of justice and specifically from an Islamic perspective. Islam views natural resources, including land, as a trust, with individuals having usufruct rights only from the amount they can reasonably cultivate and only if they are actually cultivating it themselves. The case for land reform also rests on several other grounds, including the economic argument that small farms are more productive. Unequal landholding can subvert the success of other key reforms, such as the devolution of power to the grassroots level and its accompanying judicial, administrative and police reforms, and thus condemns the poor at the grassroots level to continued oppression. Taking these factors into consideration, land reform would not only directly impact poverty by providing a means of sustainable livelihood, but also indirectly, by removing an impediment to educational attainment.

Pakistan has much to learn from the half-hearted attempts of the last three land reforms. First, it is important to eliminate exemptions such as those available for orchards, stud farms, farm machinery and gifts. Secondly, the ceiling must apply to households rather than to individuals. Thirdly, only cultivable and not wasteland should be resumed. Fourthly, it is critical to ensure that the resumed land is actually distributed in a timely fashion. While eventually a large portion of the resumed land was distributed according to Land Commission Records, this took much time to occur. Fifthly, the legal system will need to be streamlined to ensure that the appeals process does not block said reforms via the courts. Lastly, to ensure the reforms are not reserved, extension and credit support will be necessary. The benefit of past experience should ensure success for the next round of land reforms.

However, as earlier indicated, land reforms need to be just a part of the much larger agrarian reforms that would provide support to those who will acquire land from the state

and to the large majority of small farmers already existing in Pakistan. In this regard, key reforms include land consolidation, fair and effective tenancy contracts, and extension support for sustainable agriculture on small farms.

### 3.9. Plight of Peasants

Before the Mughal's rule in the sub-continent, land was considered to be property of the king and all income generated from the land was his by right. Mughals awarded vast tracts of lands in different parts of Pakistan to their chieftains of militant tribes and other influential leaders, in return for which they were provided with tribesmen in times of war from their respective areas. It was the British government who introduced land reforms in the area, to be followed by the land reforms of Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. After cultivating these lands for centuries, the Haris of this area had fallen victim to the feudal lords.

*“Millions of workers in Pakistan are held in contemporary forms of slavery.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the country employers forcibly extract labor from adults and children, restrict their freedom of movement, and deny them the right to negotiate the terms of their employment. Employers coerce such workers into servitude through physical abuse, forced confinement, and debt-bondage. The state offers these workers no effective protection from this exploitation. Although slavery is unconstitutional in Pakistan and violates various national and international laws, state practices support its existence. The state rarely prosecutes or punishes employers who hold workers in servitude. Moreover, workers who contest their exploitation are invariably confronted with police harassment, often leading to imprisonment under false charges.”*

*(Quoted from Human Rights Watch Report 1995, on “Contemporary forms of slavery in Pakistan”)*

The bonded labor and exploitation of the working classes in Pakistan is not a new phenomenon; it has existed in our society for centuries, from the Mughal era to the current post-partition period, causing untold misery. It is very difficult to estimate and give exact figures, but according to various international and national NGO's, as well as other records, the situation in Pakistan is among the worst on the planet.

*“According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), in its World Labor Report 1993, assesses the problems of debt-bondage in Pakistan to be among the worst in the world.”*

There are millions of people, especially in the rural areas of Sindh, targeted by the Waderas and Jagirdars. Bondage is particularly common in areas of agriculture, brick-making, carpet-weaving, mining, and handicraft production. These Waderas and Jagirdars

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<sup>19</sup> Slavery is defined in the Slavery Convention of 1926 as "the status or condition of a person over whom any or all the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised."

claim to be the sole owners of the laborers, peasants and poor workers of society. They exercise full authority over their lives and livelihood.

The origins of this institutionalized inhumanity can be traced back to the British period, when the concept of authority of the state on the land was established, thereby denying the right to practice collective farming and challenging the notion of equal share to peasants on landed property. Before the British occupation there was no concept of ownership of land by any individual; it was either owned by the state or there was collective ownership.

With the British conquest of the Indian sub-continent came the introduction of alien policies; ownership rights were given to their appointed officers, commonly known as ‘*Dewans*’, who were assigned the task of collecting taxes (imposed by the government in the form of land revenue) known as ‘*lagan*’. Thusly they harvested the seeds of an oppressive system of labor.

Thousands of families and millions of poor peasants, who for unknown centuries had cultivated the land for their livelihood, became the victims of trials by the landlords. The tradition of collective farming was exploited by the Waderas and its downfall led to the deterioration of farming in Pakistan:

*“This system has deteriorated to such an extent that human beings are brought and sold by landlords, with entire families being kept in virtual bondage. During the day, these Haris work in the fields with chains attached to their legs, and are watched by the landlord’s men. At night, they were confined in the landlord’s private jail.”*

*(By Aftab Alexander Mughal, “Bonds of Oppression”, in Newsline October 1998)*

Bonded labor is most common in poverty-ridden areas of Pakistan where the condition of the poor peasant is miserable, made worse by lack of employment opportunities. Finding neither good fortune nor decent prospects for living, these poor workers are compelled to work for landlords on very low wages. In time of great need, and for other basic household requirements, the poor workers acquire loans from the landlords; as their debts continue to increase, eventually they themselves become property of the landlords.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Report, the practice of bonded labor is not just confined to Sindh, but also exists in different parts of Pakistan in various forms:

*“This report is the product of a long-term investigation that started with a mission we undertook in late 1993. A Human Rights Watch/Asia researcher visited the urban centers of Lahore, Faisalabad, Peshawar, Karachi, and Hyderabad as well as rural sections of Sindh, Punjab, and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) to examine the treatment of bonded laborers and to assess the role of the government of Pakistan in maintaining and perpetuating the bonded labor system.”*

*During this investigation, more than 150 adult and child bonded laborers were interviewed at or near their work sites. In particular, thirty-nine bonded laborers were interviewed individually at brick-kilns on the outskirts of Lahore, Kasur, Peshawar, Faisalabad, and Hyderabad; twenty-two at carpet-weaving centers and private homes with carpet looms in and around Lahore, Faisalabad, Peshawar, Karachi, Hyderabad, and Mithi; and twenty-four at agricultural sites in the interior of Sindh, rural Punjab between Lahore and Faisalabad, and rural sections of the Northwest Frontier Province between Peshawar and Swabi. Throughout this report, examples are drawn from these interviews with pseudonyms substituted for the real names of the laborers. Human rights activists, development workers, lawyers, labor organizers, government officials, Muslim and Christian religious leaders, police officers and academics were also interviewed. Information gained from these interviews was supplemented by primary source materials from a number of Pakistani nongovernmental organizations.”*

Bonded labor is most prevalent in the agricultural sector, particularly in the interior of Sindh and southern Punjab, where land distribution is highly inequitable. Bondage in agrarian regions involves the purchase and sale of peasants between landlords, the maintenance of private jails to discipline and punish peasants, the forcible transference of teachers who train peasants to maintain proper financial accounts, and a pattern of rape of peasant women by landlords and the police.

Bonded labor is also common in the mining industries of Balochistan. Laborers from remote areas of Balochistan and Swat are enticed by contractors with promises of employment; while contractors initially house and support such laborers, they are eventually taken to mines in Balochistan where they are sold to local employers. Laborers are confined to work sites at the mines until arbitrarily established debts are deemed to be settled.

This ‘waderaism’ even enjoys patronage from the government, from Ayub’s period up to the present day. Waderaism, the Jagirdari system and Chudharism have exploited Pakistan’s poverty situation to their fullest desires. In order to obtain their support in elections, the political parties and their coalition forces supported these landlords by granting them lands, relaxation in laws concerning loans, and other fringe benefits.

*“In Ayub Khan’s era the mujra culture was followed by the Shikar culture. An avid shikari, Ayub Khan was invited several Sindhi waderas every hunting season and he would return the hospitality by dishing out special favors. For instance Ayub sanctioned huge loans to Ghulam Mohammad Mehar and Whaid Bux Bughio of Larkana from the Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan (ADBP.) In the late 60’s there began a mad scramble for tickets to a new party that seemed to enjoy mass popularity. To ensure their entry to the assemblies, the waderas of Sindh dropped their erstwhile ‘daddy’ Ayub Khan and hitched their wagons to Bhutto’s newly-*

*formed PPP. Far from bringing in awami raj, the Bhutto era in act strengthened the wadera and chudhry culture: wadera were readily given car permits, plots and other favours. Benazir Bhutto's government too wrote off several outstanding loans against her party feudals, including an eighth-million rupees loan against Qurban Ali Shah, who subsequently deserted her party."*

*(Quoted from Hasan Mujtaba's, "The Life and Loves of a Wadera", in Newline, February 1994)*

### **3.10. Waderaism and Chained Peasantry in Sindh**

The history of the peasantry of Sindh and its fellow rural class is marked with differing blends of atrocity carried out by the maxim of 'Waderaism'. Over many generations little has changed; the writ of wadarism and their pattern of lifestyle remained the same throughout the ages. Poor peasants are kept in custody in the jails of the Waderas, a private prison system where the all-powerful landlord of the area keeps unruly *Haris* [peasants]. Armed guards deployed in bunkers to keep watch over the inmates are also a very common practice. *Haris* who work on the land from dawn to dusk are physically chained with iron fetters weighing up to 25 kilograms when they were brought back to the prison in the evenings. Women, who either worked alongside the men in the fields or in the *waderas haveli* [mansion], were often raped by the waderas and their guards, resulting in the birth of many illegitimate children within the walls of these jails.

*"Across both banks of the river Indus from Kashmore to Shahbandar lies the Katcha – another country, ruled by the Sindh's Feudal families, the Jatois, Bhuttos, Pagaros, Khuhros, Bughios, Syeds and Kalhoras. After God in the skies, they are demi-gods on earth, says Yasin Kalhoro a landless peasant in Keti Kalhora in Dadu district."*

*(Cited in Hassan Mujtaba's "The Day of The Hari", Newline Special, 1993)*

The most shocking and miserable aspect of the practice of Waderaism is that the writ of the wadera is greater than that of the governing administration. Peasant families are kept in their custody for centuries, not just by physical imprisonment but also through the subjugation of economic bondage in the form of debt. Most of the *Haris* are trapped in debt to their landlords, and in return the *Haris* are forced to work without wages and under the strict rules and watchful eyes of the landlords' armed men. These *Haris* are forced to work in the fields, often wearing chains in their feet and sometimes even around their necks.

Aftab Alexandar Mughal, in his article 'Bonds of Oppression' in Newline's October 1998 edition, describes the situation:

*"During the day, these haris work in the fields with chains attached to their legs, and are watched by the landlord's men. At night, they were confined in the landlord's private jail."*

Several non-governmental organizations, such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), took this matter very seriously and began efforts to portray the real picture of this inhumane rule. Human rights activists and other social activists strove to release these poor peasants from the custody of their landlords. On many occasions, they took very strong action against the landlords, challenging their writ and releasing hundreds of Haris from the jails.

*“The HRCP first took action against this practice when the private jail of Landlord Ghulam Hussain Khokhar was unearthed near Hyderabad. With the help of the military, 250 haris were freed.”*

*“In June 1995, another 67 haris were freed from the Jail of Lal Mangrio, a landlord in Umerkot”*

*(Source: HRCP)*

According to these reports, the number of Haris still languishing in private jails around Sindh sits at over 4,000. Amnesty International claims that there are over three hundred private jails run by these landlords.

The bonds of oppression of the feudal landlords are very strong, because most of them belong to the elite class of political coalitions or are from influential tribes, such as the Murree's, Bugti's, and Magsi's. Their authority and writ has never been challenged by anyone and most of them are directly or indirectly supported by the influential feudal class of Pakistan. They also hold support from the police and local administrations by bribing them heavily.

*“An official in the Sindh Government says, “The kidnapers are so powerful that even Sindh Chief Minister, Liaquat Ali Jatoi hesitated to move against them. They are obviously from his coalition camp and disciples of Pir Pagaro.”*

*(Quoted from Hasan Mujaba's, “Chained Lives”, in Newslite, October 1998)*

Generations of Haris have lived as virtual slaves under the feudal class; this depicts the never ending chain of bonded labor in Pakistan. Some bonded labor camps in various parts of Pakistan have been abolished, but the story does not end here; there are still many such camps in operation, where peasants are kept in custody and in chains within the personal jails of feudal lords.

*“At least 130 chained laborers including women and children, have been set free from the lands of MNA Salim Akbar Bugti (son of the powerful tribal chief, Nawab Akbar Bugti) in Sanghar. These laborers from Sujawal and Thattal has spent three years in a bonded labor camp at Salim Bugti's farm, Kot Nawab, one of the many notorious private jails that are operated by some of Sindh's feudal lords”*

*(Quoted from “Peasants’ Plight”, Newslines, July 1993)*

While describing the situation on the ground, Aftab Alexander Mughal, in his article in Newslines of October 1998, also elaborates the role of government administrations in addressing these conditions:

*“Some periodic efforts have been made to alleviate the plight of the haris. Legislation enacted for this purpose includes the Tenancy Act 1950 and the Bonded labor Act 1992. The bonded labor Act 1992 outlaws all forms of bonded labor. It prohibits advance made under the bonded labor system and renders any custom void” by virtue of which any service as a bonded laborer. It also nullifies any previous debt and lays down stiff penalties for the enforcement of bonded labor stipulating a prison term stretching from two to five years and or a fine fifty thousand rupees.”*

*“On paper, at least these laws are good, but no government has made a serious attempt to implement them, perhaps because the powerful feudal lobby is well represented in political parties and the administration and this lobby knows how to protect its own interest.”*

This simple account on waderaism and the plight of peasants obviously does not describe the complete picture of the humanitarian failures of landlordism in Pakistan, but it does provide some basic facts and realities on the ground-level situation and the plight of the peasants under the cycle of bonded labor, chained peasantry, debt-bondage and the inhumane behavior of certain landlords. Different policies and acts were passed and different committees formed to address this adverse problem through successive governments. Unfortunately, thousands of bonded laborers are still waiting for justice. Waiting, however, is not an option; swift and concrete action is needed.

The way land reforms have been introduced and the efforts made to get them passed show the genuine concern of the People’s Government for breaking large estates and freeing the rural productive force from the yoke of feudal exploitation. The most unfortunate aspect of this problem is that these reforms were not implemented on the ground forcefully enough. The reason for this is obvious: the provincial governments, who were responsible for their implementation, have been dominated by the same feudal lords who stand to lose out. Chief ministers or governors have been either big landlords or Nawabs throughout the tenure of the Peoples’ government. Furthermore, the courts of Pakistan, vested with powers of extraordinary writ jurisdiction to interfere with the decision of the land reforms tribunals, are mostly the creation of a feudal and capitalist society; naturally they hold a biased approach. Chief martial law administrators not only stopped the further enforcement of land reforms, but actually reversed the process entirely.

This is not a new lesson for the peasantry of Pakistan to learn. History repeats itself. After getting rid of the dominating forces of the landlord’s alliance with the government, the peasantry organizations and their workers will have to organize themselves under a democratic system for political struggle, which should ensure the peaceful nature of their

struggle in a justified manner. It is only the force of the organized working people that will compel the middle class, the poor masses, and other anti-imperialist elements of this country to eradicate the twin powers of feudal and capitalist exploitation.

### **3.11. Struggle at Okara Military Farm**

*"For the last three years, the Pakistani Army has been terrorizing us in the same manner that it terrorized Bengalis in 1971. So far our movement has been peaceful. But if the military does not end its atrocities, we may take up arms or resort to suicide attacks for our rights,"*

*(Anwar Javed Dogar, chief organizer of the Anjuman Mazareen Punjab (AMP))*

The farmers of district Okara have been facing harsh treatment by the military since August 2002. More than 20,000 military personnel have cordoned off the area in an attempt to force the peasants to give up their demand for the "ownership" of the land they have tilled for decades, and to force them to agree with the dominance of the military over the farms under their control.

Peasants have been cultivating the land under the *batai* (sharing) system under the Punjab Tenancy Act, but are being forced to change over to a contract system. The peasants of the Okara district have raised this issue to higher authorities, who have responded by forming a three-member committee to look into the issue and to ascertain how the peasants could be awarded ownership rights. The Punjab Revenue Board refused to recognize the tiller as tenants, stating that the land was under illegal occupation by the Army and therefore was not authorized to be let for tenancy. Moreover, the Army has produced no records of its share of the produce received since 1947 under *batai*. It can be assumed, therefore, that the Army has embezzled a huge amount of money; around Rs.20 billion per farm. There are 25 such farms across Punjab. The peasants established their right to tenancy by producing documents. Thus a big scam was exposed, in which the Army was involved.

In relation to these findings, Mr. Asim Sajjad, a representative of peoples' rights movements, raised the issue in favor of the peasants' struggle in Okara and against the forceful actions of the military against farmers in Punjab. He said:

*"Such type of peasant movement has never been witnessed in Punjab, in which during the past nine months six peasants have lost their lives, Giving a historical perspective of the issue, Mr. Asim claimed that during the colonial period farmers from east Punjab were resettled in Okara and Khanewal on the assurance that they would be given proprietary land rights. Over the years they turned the barren grasslands into 70,000 acres of farmland. This land, owned by the government of Punjab, was leased to the army for 20-25 years, he claimed. Thus military farms came into being. This lease expired recently, but by June 2000 the military administration in these areas began pursuing peasants to enter into contract agreements which stipulated that they would vacate land within six months if it was*

*needed for defence purposes. All normal tenancy laws had been set aside in the contract; in case of default a peasant could be ejected from these lands within three months, he claimed. Rangers have been deployed on the Okara farmlands to contain the peasant movement, as peasants were demanding ownership of land because they have been tenants there since the colonial period, While addressing this issue, Board of Revenue and the public accounts department have given decisions in favor of peasants. It is also a human-rights issue because 35-40 per cent of the peasants on these farms are from the minority Christian community.”*

*(Asim Sajjad, Representative of Peoples Rights Movement in his address on Donors ignore local community: Homage paid to Akhter Hameed Khan, Karachi)*

## 4. Women's Land Rights\*

### 4.1. The History and Struggle of Land Reforms

In light of the oppressive situations peasants often find themselves in, we cannot think of many significant roles rural women have played in the struggle for land rights; on occasion, however, they have been visible in the struggle, even dating back to the Mughal era in various parts of present-day Pakistan. Women like Bibi Alai, Mai Laddhi, and Mai Bakhtawar raised their voice in the struggle for their land rights. Women in Pakistan, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world have been victims of the double oppression of class and gender.

Although women from the grassroots-level have participated in different conferences and mass demonstrations in defending the land rights of the rural poor throughout Pakistan, instances have been very limited. But the women mentioned above are very prominent in this regard, and the stories of their bravery and untiring efforts for their land rights are classical examples of the role of women in peasantry movements in Pakistan.

### 4.2. Land Rights in Sindh and the Role of Women

A history of collective farming and land rights movements in Sindh is incomplete without mentioning Shah Inayat Shaheed of Jhok Sharif. He was a recognized master of Sufi, who was a disciple of Shah Abdul Mali.

As quoted by Mr. Ahmad Salim in his article '*The Sufi Revolution*', "Almost 100 years before the French revolution, as the great Sindhi writer Amar Jaleed records, Sufi Shah Inayat endeavored to demolish the authority of autocrats and feudal lords in Sindh, and in doing so, he invited their enmity and aversion". Shah Inayat of Jhok engineered a revolt against the powers of the landlord. He organized collective farming and denied a share of the crop to the landlords, saying that the land belongs to God and that only the one who grew the produce had a right to it. This movement is famous in Sindh as '*Jo kheray so khai tehreek*' (The one who grows should eat).

The quest for land rights and collective farming continued for centuries, with the foundation, led by the Sufi saints and peasantry leaders, providing a platform for raising slogans against the oppressors. It was in 1947 when the peasantry of Sindh from districts Sanghar, Nawabshah, and Tharparkar refused to pay the 'Betai' (revenue) on the agrarian land, deciding that they would not pay more than 50% of Betai to the landlords. This scenario created a volatile atmosphere throughout Sindh, which led to an armed struggle between the peasants and the landlords. The peasants were attacked and were deprived of their land and property.

The Sindh Hari Committee, however, retaliated in a very organized manner; they gathered their human resources and coordinated their efforts to counter those of the landlords. In this struggle, men and women were together at the forefront; among the women stood Mai

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\* Most of the work done on this issue is more or less based on oral traditions and historiography.

Bakhtawar. Born in 1907, Bakhtawar belonged to Danisar village, district Tharparkar. By caste she was from the ‘Lashari’ tribe, one of the most famous tribes of Balochistan.

It was during this time that the progressive movement in Balochistan and other provinces of the state grew stronger against the landlords and organizations; among these organizations, the Sindh Hari Committee was the most influential. Bakhtawar, like many Sindhis, also belonged to a village where Jagirdars and landlords had for centuries dominated agrarian life through the exploitation and harsh treatment of its peasants.

The Sindh Hari Committee organized several rallies, conferences and demonstration throughout the province. On 22 June, under the leadership of its famous comrade Haider Bakhs Jatui, a conference was organized in Jhando village; thousands of peasants from neighboring villages were present. The landlord of the area, Choudhry Saifullah, and his armed men came to know that the peasants and villagers were in conference, and with no-one to stand against them, entered the village and tried to take all the grain and crops from the farms. Mai Bakhtawar was never a mere spectator, however; she stood in front of the landlord and said, ‘you can not take a single seed of a grain from here, until the real owners of this crop and the peasants of the village return back from the conference, and get their basic right’. Upon hearing this, the landlord lost all control and ordered his men to kill her. Mai Bakhtawar in that moment became the first peasant worker in the history of the peasant movement to achieve the status of martyrdom in the cause of peasants and poor tillers.

Sindh’s Haris have always given strong resistance against the oppressive policies of their rulers and Jagirdars. After the creation of Pakistan, the peasant men and women of the province continued to participate in the struggle for their rights. Examples of the efforts of women cannot be ignored. In 1970, for example, a bill regarding the auction of land was introduced. Mass protests and agitation across the province was launched by the Hari Committees, condemning this policy of the government. Many people were arrested by the government authorities; among them were a few female peasant workers as well. The struggle of women with regard to their rights on issues of collective farming, land ownership, water disputes, and agrarian concerns continues to this day in the shape of the Sindhyani movement.

#### **4.3. The Sindhyani Movement in Sindh**

Supported by the masses commitment and zeal to further the peasantry movement, the Sindhyani Movement has served the soil of Sindh remarkably. It is not only the leadership but also the workers who symbolize the culture of agitation against oppressive apparatuses. The most interesting part of this movement is that women of Sindh from rural areas have served and worked for the promotion of their basic land rights shoulder-to-shoulder with their male counterparts. Their revolutionary passion became a striding force against the Jagirdars and their associated policies of increases in land revenue, unjustified taxes, and unequal distribution of land.

Processions and demonstrations were held in different parts of the province, in which a maximum number of women participated from the remotest of areas. It is important to mention here that most of the women were arrested. In one incident in Hyderabad, Haris launched an anti-government movement against the concept of bidding for government land. The Haris reacted with coordinated agitation and staged protests in different areas; as many as 198 arrests were made, among them 6 were women.

#### **4.4. The Punjab Scenario**

In the wake of Dulla Bhatti, Mai Laddhi and her resistance forces took over the armed struggle against the Mughals and their land policies and revenue system. She was also a mother of a famous peasant leader, Dulla Bhatti, one of the most famous names in the history of Punjab. The contribution of this family in the history of Punjab (and especially with reference to the peasantry movement) is unique. She, along with other female workers of the village, stood as an unyielding force against the landlords and the Mughal army in the absence of Dulla Bhatti and his companions. The armed men of the landlords and the Mughals entered the village Pindi Bhatian, but had no idea that the women of the village would give them such a hard time, and ultimately failed to curb the rebellion. Her efforts for the peasantry and acts of bravery in the absence of her male counterparts were remarkable, and remain the sole example of a women's movement that emerged during the Mughal period.

#### **4.5. The Okara Military Farm Issue**

Okara, an area in Punjab, has been in the news for quite some time, because the area has been witness to an agitation by the local peasants for more than 15 months against the military junta's attempts to deprive them of their hard-won rights. Recently, tensions have exploded in the Okara district; a peasants' uprising was staged and tenants raised their demands for ownership rights of the land. These peasants have worked this land for the last 8 to 9 decades.

During British rule, these military farms were established in the early 1900s. Farmers, who had cultivated these lands for generations, and had full tenancy rights over these lands since 1874, are being forcibly deprived of their rights. Many workers were asked to cultivate the land on a tenancy basis. The farms were to provide dairy and other products for military purposes. At present, four generations of peasants have worked on these farms, but still they do not have the right of ownership. In Okara district alone, over 17,000 acres of land belong to these farms.

The current military regime, after assuming the power in 1999 and in order to increase the income of the state, went on an all-out strike against the working class. Peasants who had worked for over 88 years on these lands were asked to become contractors instead of tenants, meaning that they could cancel the contract any time and then take the land over themselves. The tenant organization rejected this move and then decided that they will not pay anything to the military farms administration.

The motivation behind this new change was in grabbing this costly land from the poor farmers. They decided that they would pay the tenancy cost to the Punjab revenue department. Agitation and violence flared up in March 2008 when military authorities tried to test the ground. They sent the police to a village to collect wood; the villagers refused to give in and asked the police party to go away. Then the police of the whole district came to collect the wood from the villagers. The women of the village came to the forefront and attacked the police with sticks. This motivated the rest of the peasants, who all began to fight back; such was the intensity of the violence that the police had to resort to firing in the air. One of these police bullets wounded a child. The police had no alternative in the end but to run away from the scene.

The peasantry organizations of this area organized a peasant's convention, held on 16th November at Okara military farms. This convention was attended by over 10,000; among them were over 1000 women peasants. The convention was organized by Anjamaan Muzaraeen (Tenant's Organization) of district Okara. The main slogans raised at the convention were "ownership or death", "Those who cultivate the land, has the right of ownership", and "we will win". Most of the representatives of the peasant organization across the country were present. The peasant convention ended with a lot of enthusiasm and with determination to continue their struggle.

## 5. Critical Analysis

Article 23 of the Constitution of Pakistan states that “every citizen shall have the right to acquire, hold, and dispose of property in any part of Pakistan”.<sup>20</sup> It further guarantees the “rights to property and equality of citizen as fundamental rights”<sup>21</sup>, and calls for bringing all laws into conformity with the Holy Quran and *Sunnah*, and to strike down any custom having the force of law as far as it is inconsistent with these fundamental rights. There is no direct provision in the Constitution on women’s right to inheritance, but it does provide guarantees and principles of policy to ensure justice without discrimination<sup>22</sup>. The role of impartiality also envisages the equal and collective rights for both men and women.

In Pakistan, the livelihoods of rural men and women revolve around arable land. Land as an asset is one of the basic physical resources and provides food, space for livestock and personal shelter; the role of collective farming in this sense remains a top priority. Land is also a source of security and power, and is an important determinant of social status in rural and urban areas across the country. This was as true of the farmers and *Haris* (landless share croppers) of Sindh as of the landless tenant farmers of Punjab, NWFP and Balochistan. Besides being a source of food, income and employment, land provides cash in times of need to poor rural families owning small measures of land.

During the Mughal period, the rate of land revenue was fixed at the highest rate practically possible to recover; to maintain the military strength of Mansabdar, Jagirdar, Nawab’s and Zamindars used both for the recovery of tax and support for the emperor’s wars whenever or wherever needed. The high taxes left only the bare minimum for the subsistence of the farmer, whose position was no different than that of an ‘untouchable’. Never in the history of South Asia was the subjugation and poverty of the common man as great as it was under the Mughals.

Since the tenure of Mansabdar, Jagirdar, Nawab’s and Zamindars in Sindh and other provinces lasted on average only two years, and at other places only slightly more than three years, the poor peasant was not at all ready to invest in the development of land or the construction of wells, tanks or small dams for storage of water; nor would he invest in excavating new canals and the de-silting and maintenance of existing ones. Production went down and yet the burden of taxes was not relaxed, and it was the peasant who suffered. Governors (Jagirdars) instilled fear in the peasantry of the transfer of demanded payments of revenue before harvest. When the farmers were not able to pay the land revenue, they were tortured, made to endure hunger and thirst and compelled to sell their women, children and cattle to pay the taxes. Villages were attacked, women and children sold into slavery on the false pretext of rebellion. Even the farmers themselves were taken away in heavy iron chains and sold as slaves. Any assessment of women’s land and property rights and their role in the peasantry movement, therefore, has to be within the

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20 *Chart of Customary Practices in Pakistan in Comparison with Statutory Law*, Shirkat Gah / WLUML, Women & Law Pakistan Country Project, 1995

21 *Women’s Right to Inheritance and its Implementation*. National Commission on the Status of Women, 2005. Mimeo

22 *Ibid.* p.52

context of the above mentioned aspects of land ownership and the revolutionary movement in the country.

Given these events, the concept of collective farming, women's roles in agricultural and domestic production, food processing, fetching water and fuel-wood, and in the act of reproduction, this study finds that women in South Asia are deprived from so many more things than men. During times of economic hardship, the burden of adjustment is often assumed by women. They absorb shocks to household welfare by expanding their already stretched working day and by sacrificing their own portions of food for their children.