

Summary: Peasant Land Rights Movement of Pakistan

Sustainable Development Policy Institute

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This report encapsulates the history of peasant movements within the sub-continent from the days of the Mughal Empire through to the present day, with specific regard to their struggles in gaining basic human and property rights.

This report is divided into several chapters, covering in chronological order three periods of the history of the sub-continent and its modern day components, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The first chapter is concerned with peasants' rights movement under the Mughals. In order to ensure smooth collection of revenue from the peasants, the Mughals put in place an elaborate revenue system called the 'revenue farming'. This system was mediated through 'jagirdars' and landlords and entrenched rather than restructured the exploitative ancient revenue system. Later, the right of collecting land revenue was sold by public auction to the highest bidders. The concept of private ownership further deteriorated the conditions of peasants by putting an end to the joint social benefits of collective farming. The chapter then highlights how such exploitation led to the rise of mass resistance of peasants in different provinces and traces the efforts of Pashtun peasants, the Mehdavi movement, as well as individuals such as Dulla Bhatti and Shah Inayat of Jhok.

The second chapter illustrates the efforts of India's underclasses within the spectrum of British imperialism, charting the rise of organizations like the Sindh Hari and the Punjab Kisan Committees in opposition to the alignment of western capitalism and the indigenous feudal culture. The peasants' struggle was usurped by political leaders to generate popular support during that time. The peasants' demands were formulated in diluted and compromised terms aimed at winning certain concessions within the existing exploitative zamindar system rather than abolishing it. The resulting movements were violent, sporadic and inconsistent. Political parties like Muslim League and India National Congress came into being as a result of government's efforts to co-opt and substitute these violent movements with non-violent constitutional ones. Although, All India Peasant's Committee was another political party, it took a lot of steps to improve the situation of the farmers. Peasants organized themselves in unions in all provinces all over the United India; All India Kisan Sabha was founded in 1936 and with its radical outlook and revolutionary slogans, successfully mobilized over 800,000 peasants.

The third chapter deals with issues related to the peasants' movement in the post-partition period, contrasting events in provinces against the backdrop of the turmoil of modern nation building. The issues of peasantry related to exploitation through the revenue system, land distribution and tenancy acts etc., persisted in their worse forms even after the partition. The peasants' movement with the help of political parties and numerous peasant organizations all over the country gained a lot of momentum and carried out widespread agitation all over Pakistan. It was because of this popular support that the peasants' movement successfully withstood the severe repression that the government exerted in the first six years after the partition. Although All India Kisan Sabha's activities were curbed due to the government's pressure, the peasants' movement

survived through peasantry organizations, their associations and conferences and also succeeded in achieving some concessions regarding ceiling legislations, security of tenure and rent reduction, consolidation of holdings etc. from the government. Besides these gains, these movements also helped in raising the political consciousness of the peasantry. Thousands of peasants joined the struggle for democracy in West Bengal when the central government dismissed the United Front Government of West Bengal. The chapter further analyses the struggle of the peasantry in different provinces all over the country.

The final chapter is devoted specifically to the role of women within the peasants' movement, giving credit to the often overlooked part they have played. Due to the double oppression of class and gender, women's participation in the mass struggle of peasantry has not been as significant as it could have been; moreover, where they have risen against the odds and given exemplary sacrifices, these instances have not been appropriately recorded or acknowledged. In the fight for peasants' rights, women like Bibi Alai, Mai Laddi, and Mai Bakhtawar have played important roles and they must be recognized for their untiring efforts towards the cause of rural women and peasantry. Another aspect of the absence of women from the discussion of land rights is the lack of recognition of the issue of women's land rights. The dearth of literature available on the topic of women's land rights in itself is a testimony to the gravity of the issue. Therefore a lot needs to be done with regards to highlighting the issue of women's land rights on all levels and plains.