

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“He who tills has the right to eat”: “Development” and the Politics of Agrarian Reform in late 1940s and early 1950s Sindh

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Abstract

In post-Independence South Asia, the spotlight often fell on land reform, such as the *zamindari* abolition that took place in parts of India after 1947. In Pakistan, the issue of land redistribution also surfaced periodically in the decades following independence. But, as the case of Sindh in the late 1940 and early 1950s reveals, the focus was on how to ‘modernize’ tenancy arrangements rather than achieving more equitable land reallocation, since—for some contemporaries—left unchanged these represented a major impediment to increasing agricultural productivity, and hence Pakistan’s overall development. This article explores the context in which Sindh’s 1947–48 Hari Committee of Enquiry was set up and its various recommendations that proved controversial, together with responses to the legislation (1950 Sind Tenancy Act) that followed, highlighting the role of officials and peasant representatives, and shedding light on this important but largely overlooked episode of development-related policy-making in Pakistan’s early years.

Keywords: Sindh; *hari*; *zamindar*; agrarian reform; development

In May 1948, it was reported that in Pakistan:

A Committee, appointed by the Sindh¹ Government in March 1947 [*prior to independence*] to examine tenancy rights in the province, has recommended against the abolition of the *zamindar* system . . . Steps are recommended

¹ Before and during the colonial era (1843–1947) the British romanized the name of the province as ‘Sind’ or sometimes ‘Scinde’. However, the accurate phonetic transliteration is ‘Sindh’ (سندھ). This article accordingly only uses ‘Sind’ when quoting from contemporary sources, though it should be noted that transliteration inconsistencies persisted well into the post-independence period. In 2013 the Sindh Legislative Assembly unanimously approved a law that required ‘h’ to be added to the province’s name in all legal acts and ordinances. See ‘Pakistanis have Sind no more as province changes name to Sindh’,

however to ensure the peasant receives the full share of his produce from the landlord and has security of tenure.²

This – in a nutshell – was the outcome of the Hari Committee of Enquiry set up and tasked in early 1947 with investigating ways of reforming tenancy arrangements in the Sindh countryside. While its majority verdict, published in May the following year, prompted the long-awaited Sind Tenancy Act of 1950 (the first to be introduced in the new state of Pakistan), its report recommended against both abolishing the *zamindar* system and granting full tenancy rights to Sindh *haris* (“wielders of the plough,” or share-tenants). However, as this 1950 act patently failed to address stark inequalities that were all too apparent in the Sindh countryside, the committee’s stance was viewed by critics and supporters alike as confirmation of just how powerful landowners (*zamindars*) were in the life and politics of this Pakistani province, and just how downtrodden its *haris* remained.³

In 1947, more than 80% of cultivated land in Sindh was owned by “big landlords”: “Nearly 7,000 of them . . . owned more than 500 acres each and of them 246 had over 5,000 acres each in their possession, and one of them owned as much as 3,000.”⁴ Over three-quarters of a century later, the main “stakeholders” in the province’s agricultural sector remain its *zamindars*, while *haris* still farm the land owned by others in return for a physical percentage of the crop (wheat) or revenue (cotton). Rural poverty in early 21st-century Sindh is pervasive and deep. Whereas some 20% of urban Sindhis are classed as “poor,” over twice as many rural Sindhis, many of them *haris*, fall into this category. What is more, Sindh contains the widest rural-urban gap in Pakistan, and the largest disparity in “human development.” In 2006, according to the World Bank, Sindh possessed the narrowest distribution of land ownership in the country, with 1% of all its farmers owning 150% more land than the combined holdings of 62% of its small farmers. As the World Bank report, *Securing Sindh’s Future Prospects and Challenges*, explained:

Given its feudal traditions, progressive ideas and reforms have always taken more time to take roots in the interior [sic] of Sindh than in most other areas of Pakistan. Sindh has the highest incidence of absolute landlessness, highest share of tenancy and lowest share of land ownership in the country.⁵

Guardian, February 13, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/13/pakistan-province-sindh-becomes-sindh> (accessed March 27, 2024).

² UK Opdom No. 38, May 6–12, 1948, L/PO/12/14 BL.

³ ‘*Jeko Khere So Khaye*’ (He who tills has the right to eat), which appears in the title of this article, is a popular Sindh quote attributed to the late-17th and early-18th-century Sufi leader Shah Inayat of Jhok (1655–1718) who led peasants in a protest against paying agricultural taxes to the rulers of the time or handing over a share of their produce to their landlords. See Nosheen Khaskhelly, M. A. Khowaja and Asghar Raza Burfat, ‘Peasant Movement in Sindh: a case study of the struggle of Shah Inayatullah’, *Grassroots* 49, no. II (July–December 2015): 44–51; and Annemarie Schimmel, ‘Shah Inayat Shahid of Jhok: a Sindh mystic of the early 18th century’, *Liber Amicorum* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 151–170.

⁴ Mushtaq Ahmad, ‘Land in Pakistan’, *Pakistan Horizon* 12, no. 1 (March 1959): 30.

⁵ Cited in “Poverty in Rural Sindh,” *Dawn* online, April 22, 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1024852/poverty-in-rural-sindh> (accessed March 27, 2024). For a systematic overview of the economic challenges facing Sindh in the twenty-first century, see Ishrat Husain, Aijaz A. Qureshi, and Nadeem Hussain, *The Economy of Modern Sindh: Opportunities Lost and Lessons for the Future* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Accordingly, this article addresses a pivotal but largely understudied episode in development thinking in post-independence Pakistan. Despite the need for industrial growth driving so much debate in the 1950s and thereafter, early policy decisions made regarding agrarian reform held wider significance, bearing in mind that most of Pakistan's population was embedded in inequitable rural economies and ways of life. Hence, this article addresses both why Pakistan has failed to initiate any significant land reform, whether in the immediate post-independence period or subsequently, and, more specifically, how development and equity fitted into early agrarian-related initiatives.⁶

Debates around optimum ways of organizing the agrarian sector in South Asia have deep historical roots, going back – from the perspective of the British presence – to the time when (and the way in which) the East India Company secured its revenue bases in the subcontinent.⁷ However, agrarian structures, as well as not being uniform, were never static. Rather, they shifted in relation to changing circumstances (such as markets and mechanization), emerging technologies (such as those that would much later underpin “Green Revolution” of the mid-20th century), and the wider political climate.⁸ Prior to the consolidation of British control, peasant proprietorship was by and large considered the “birth right” of the small ordinary cultivator, while *zamindars* (landholders, particularly those who leased land to tenant farmers) were originally mere collectors of revenue derived from royal or other state-held lands. In contrast, the East India Company set aside the principle of the field being the property of the person who first cultivated it and transferred land under lease by annual public auction to the highest bidder. Thereafter, Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement of 1793 in eastern India converted existing cultivators into tenants and former rent collectors into *zamindars*.⁹

In Sindh, located on the other side of the subcontinent from Bengal, *waderos* (local headmen) and village chieftains were allocated property rights over land following the province's annexation by the British in the mid-19th century: “the status of the *hari* was downgraded from that of cultivator to that of sharecropper” (or more accurately, share-tenant), and “land, with share-tenants attached, increasingly became a saleable commodity,” tradable for profit.¹⁰ By the early 20th century, as in

⁶ The broader plight of the Sindhi *hari* is explored in depth in Mishal Khan, *Empire, Law and Order Making after the Abolition of Slavery: Three Labouring Figures in India* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2020), Chapter 4, but the 1947–48 Hari Committee of Enquiry and reactions to it are touched upon only briefly (218–222).

⁷ David Washbrook, “Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 649–721; and Peter Robb, *Agrarian Development in Colonial India: The British and Bihar* (London: Routledge, 2021).

⁸ Govindan Parayil, “The Green Revolution in India: A Case Study of Technological Change,” *Technology and Culture* 33, no. 4 (1992): 737–756.

⁹ Rekha Bandyopadhyay, “Land System in India: A Historical Review,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 52 (1993): A149–A155.

¹⁰ Maliha H. Hussain, Abdul Razzak Saleemi, Saima Malik, and Shazreh Hussain, “Bonded Labour in Agriculture: a rapid assessment in Sindh and Baluchistan, Pakistan,” Working Paper (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2004), 4, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_082026/lang-en/index.htm (accessed March 27, 2024). For a classic study of the situation in Sindh, see Feroz Ahmed, “Agrarian Change and Class Formation in Sindh,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 19, no. 39 (1984): 149–164.

other parts of South Asia, such property transfers had contributed to rising local communal tensions and become a political issue.¹¹ But, whereas legislation elsewhere in the subcontinent created some, albeit limited, opportunities for tenant protection, no such regulations were passed in Sindh during the colonial period. Local administrators, buttressed by the powerful landed interests dominating the province's political institutions, were reluctant to grant even the small concessions conferred on tenants elsewhere. As a consequence, debates on tenancy rights in Sindh in the late 1940s and early 1950s shed light on wider issues linked to agrarian reform in post-independence Pakistan, and the wider politics of the time.

However, the 1947–48 Hari Committee of Enquiry's findings and reactions to them also highlight contemporary ideas centered on the role (and declared urgency) of development thinking in Pakistan's formative years. This is because, as available evidence indicates, reforming tenancy arrangements from the perspective of who would own the land was never the main concern of the majority of the committee's members or sponsors. Rather, their priority was the restructuring of existing tenancy relationships to allow for a more productive – or “modernized” – agriculture to emerge in the province. Unsurprisingly, given the level of continuity in terms of landownership being proposed, *hari* representatives rejected the committee's recommendations and lobbied for a different, more equitable way forward.

Moreover, because the committee was commissioned *prior* to independence, but only issued its report *after* Pakistan had come into existence, its story offers a rare opportunity to reflect on the impact of changing political circumstances on such discussions, their rationale, and the responses generated. That policies regarding Sindh's agrarian development were conceived during a period of political and administrative transition draws attention to important continuities linking post-Second World War reconstruction planning and the so-called “improvement” strategies pursued, at least on paper, once Pakistan was established. More generally, ideas about development made a lasting impact on the physical and political environment – and the people living in it – in late colonial and early post-colonial South Asia.¹² Imperial rule, post-colonial ambitions, nation-state building, and so-called “modernization” drives all left their mark – materially and imaginatively – on the South Asian landscape. However, pre-independence planning that – against the backdrop of the Second World War – had tended to stress the need for greater efficiency now made way for a more explicit emphasis on “development” in the recalibrated post-1947 political environment.¹³ At this time, development was viewed, by and large, as “a process of economic activity in which countries move from ‘traditional civilizations’, through a transition of industrialization towards ‘tertiary

¹¹ The emerging communalization of land ownership in Sindh is addressed in David Cheesman, *Landlord Power and Rural Indebtedness in Colonial Sind 1865–1901* (London: Curzon, 1997).

¹² For a discussion of the transitions involved and their significance, see Uma Kothari, “From colonialism administration to development studies: a postcolonial critique of the history of development studies,” in *A Radical History of Development Studies: Individuals, Institutions and Ideologies*, ed. Uma Kothari (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 47–66.

¹³ For a near contemporary assessment of the economic challenges facing early post-independence Pakistan, see Albert Waterston, *Planning in Pakistan: organization and implementation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), Chapter 1 “First Efforts at Planning.”

civilizations' in which service sectors dominate.”¹⁴ In the context of South Asia, its new governments made “a determined effort to lift their economics to a higher growth path by altering colonial structures of production with the help of a series of economic plans,” and, as a consequence, “rapid industrialization became the central theme” of Pakistan’s development strategy.¹⁵

In many ways, development rhetoric after independence was closely related to breaking with the recent colonial past. From the perspective of early nation-building, it became important to demonstrate the material progress that independence had, in effect, promised and was now expected to deliver. Efficiency, after all, was about making existing systems work better, and this characterized the rhetoric of the late-colonial period in India, when per capita income had fallen by 0.5% per year.¹⁶ “Development,” in contrast, made places “modern”; and being “modern” was what an independent state aimed to be in the middle of the 20th century. From the planning of new urban centers to reconfiguring the countryside’s topography (whether in the form of canals, dams and barrages, *pukha* tarmacked roads, railway lines, or electricity pylons), the fabric of (economic, political, social, and even cultural) life in post-colonial states was affected by attempts to reshape the material realities within which they operated. Planned development could also involve redistributing land ownership, such as the *zamindari* abolition in various Indian states, which took place with varying success in intervals after 1947.¹⁷ But while in Pakistan the issue of land reform surfaced periodically in the decades following independence, its focus, as highlighted by the case of Sindh in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was primarily on reforming contractual relations between landlords and tenants rather than attempting a more equitable reallocation of land.

This article thus first introduces the central players who helped drive the following story of attempted agrarian reform in early post-independence Sindh. Of course, what happened in the late 1940s and early 1950s cannot be explained simply by the actions of individuals: no one person can determine the course of history. But equally, this does not mean that individuals are unimportant: arguably, history is made by people, and so, in certain circumstances, human agency can prove significant, even decisive.¹⁸ The article then turns to the broader framework, in particular how far planning for post-(Second World)war reconstruction underpinned

¹⁴ For contemporary examples of this thinking, see Colin Clark, *The conditions of economic progress* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1940) and J. Fourastié, *Le grand espoir du xxème siècle. progrès technique, progrès économique, progrès social* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1949), both cited in *Perspectives on Global Development 2019* (Perspectives on Global Development 2019: Rethinking Development Strategies | Perspectives on Global Development | OECD iLibrary (oecd-ilibrary.org) (accessed March 27, 2024).

¹⁵ Siddiqur Osmani, “Explaining Growth in South Asia,” in *Diversity in Economic Growth: Global Insights and Explanations*, eds. G. McMahon, H.S. Esfahani, and L. Squire (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014), 78–132

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁷ The complex politics involved in *zamindari* abolition in the former United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) are explored in Peter Reeves, “The Congress and the Abolition of Zamindari in Uttar Pradesh,” *Journal of South Asian Studies* 8, nos. 1-2 (1985): 154-167. See also P. S. Appu, “Tenancy Reform in India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 10, nos. 33/35, Special Number (August 1975): 1339-1375.

¹⁸ “Many historians now believe that the culture of the group, and even the will of the individual, are potentially at least as important causal agents of change as the impersonal forces of material output and demographic growth.” Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History,” *Past and Present* 85, no. 1 (1979): 7.

initiatives aimed at increasing agricultural production in Sindh both before and after Partition in 1947, before going on to look at the more immediate context in which the Hari Committee of Enquiry was established, identified its priorities, and went about its business. Finally, the article considers the outcome of the enquiry, what the exercise produced (or did not produce) in terms of concrete change, and how the committee's recommendations were received and critiqued by contemporaries, *haris* included. While the larger history of rural Sindh remains sidelined within historical narratives, this article's main objective is to bring into clearer perspective the dynamics shaping agrarian development policymaking and politics during Pakistan's transition from colonial rule to independent statehood.

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In the second half of the 1940s, Sindh was in flux. While, thanks to Partition, its borders were not redrawn, it was a place that had already experienced change due to its recent (1936) shift in administrative status to full-fledged province. To this was now added uncertainty of what the new state of Pakistan would mean in practice. People, and institutions, had to respond and adapt at short notice to the challenges of a reconfigured environment. As a predominantly agricultural province, any proposed changes to Sindh's agrarian *status quo* automatically assumed significance, and many lives stood to be touched, directly or indirectly, by the potential knock-on effects. Whittling down the "cast of players" most immediately associated with debates on agrarian reform in late 1940s and early 1950s Sindh, we can divide them into two categories: those who played decisive "individual" roles and the slightly more distanced "interested parties," whose responses mattered nevertheless. For the purposes of this article, the former comprised Sir Roger Thomas, chair of the Hari Committee of Enquiry; Muhammad Masud, a committee member who publicly challenged its report; and the Sindh Hari Committee (SHC), which represented *hari* interests during this period. As for the second group, we can place the provincial Sindh authorities, the Muslim League, *zamindars*, and (after August 1947) Partition-related refugees.

Sir Roger Thomas (1886–1960) was a British agricultural expert and former official who played a major part in determining official policy in Sindh, staying on there after independence.¹⁹ As advisor to the Government of Sindh between 1944 and 1952, he chaired the "Sind Farm Tenancy Legislation Committee" (the Hari Committee of Enquiry's official title). This role allowed Thomas to champion his long-held personal belief in the need to restructure, and (as he saw it) improve economic relationships in the Sindhi countryside.²⁰ While incurring intense personal criticism in the wake of the committee's findings for his failure to champion *zamindari* abolition, Thomas's vision of

¹⁹ The biographical details that appear here are based on material available at the British Library (Mss Eur F235), supplemented by insights provided by (Sir) Roger Thomas's daughter, Dr. Sophy Thomas, in 2018. Roger Thomas was knighted in 1947.

²⁰ Directly linked to Thomas's functions as Agricultural Advisor between 1944 and 1952 were a whole string of appointments to various official committees, commissions of enquiry, and other expert bodies. Throughout, Thomas remained deeply exercised by the question of irrigation, and particularly how to address problems of waterlogging and soil salinity that could arise in irrigated land. But there were very few aspects of agriculture that escaped his attention: animal husbandry, rice cultivation, insect pests (the dreaded locust), mechanization, forestry, fisheries, marketing, prices – all of these and more are topics of interest reflected in his afore-mentioned papers available at the British Library.

how to make Sindhi agriculture more productive trumped any other considerations. His strong faith in the positive impact of new technologies, such as the tractor, together with belief in the benefits of better-quality seeds and irrigation techniques, meant he sought to tackle the obstacles created by Sindh's existing tenancy arrangements rather than advocating a root-and-branch land reform agenda.²¹ Rural development, from Thomas's perspective, hinged on increasing agricultural output, which in turn required rural stability rather than the introduction of changes likely to unsettle the countryside. Thus, for Thomas, simply handing land over to its cultivators was out of the question, as this would create very large numbers of small farmers without the acreage or access to machinery required of more "modern" forms of agricultural production: "under existing conditions, the disadvantages of granting tenancy rights outweigh[ed] the advantages."²²

Thomas, who graduated with a degree in agriculture from University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in 1912, was appointed to the Indian Agricultural Service in Madras in 1913. However, during the First World War, as Satia has persuasively explored, the Indian government became heavily invested in the economic potential of what would later become Iraq, then Mesopotamia.²³ In 1917, Thomas was seconded to the Government of India's Foreign and Political Department to serve as a cotton expert with the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, and given the military rank of captain. Later, in 1923, he became the force's Director of Agriculture. Two years later, he became Managing Director of Diala Cotton Plantations in Iraq, deciding that his future lay in "entrepreneurial" agriculture (he formally resigned from government service in 1926). Then, in the late 1920s, Thomas returned to India as an independent agricultural businessman. In 1928, he was appointed Managing Director of the British Cotton Growing Association, Punjab, ultimately shifting in 1932 to the district of Mirpurkhas in Sindh, where, with two Indian partners, he formed the Sind Land Development Company (SLDC) to commercially farm lands made available by the recently completed Sukkur (Lloyd) Barrage irrigation project. Thomas remained the SLDC's Managing Director until his death in 1960.²⁴

²¹ According to one report, in 1947 there were approximately 500 tractors in the whole of West Pakistan. See Saeed Hafeez, ed., *10 Years of Agriculture Development in Pakistan (1958-68)* (Karachi: Shakeel Printing Press, n.d.), 151, cited in Shuja Ahmed, *Economic and Social Change in Khairpur (1947-1980)* (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012), 54.

²² Roger Thomas, *Notes on Agricultural Development in Sind* (Karachi: Government Press, 1945), 8.

²³ Priya Satia, "Developing Iraq: Britain, India and the Redemption of Empire and Technology in the First World War," *Past & Present* 197, no. 1 (2007): 211-255.

²⁴ Thomas was not the only British source of "expertise" to stay on in post-independence Pakistan. In the first decade after 1947, Pakistan was awash with non-Pakistani "experts," some brought in from outside and many more staying on in the region as part of its transition to independence. The best known of these include Sir Francis Mudie, who, between August 1947 and August 1949, took on the job of Governor of the Punjab, as well as Pakistan's first two chiefs of army staff, generals Sir Frank Messervy (1947-49) and Sir Douglas Gracey, the latter holding the post from 1949 until the beginning of 1951, when it passed to General Ayub Khan. But these high-profile individuals were just the tip of the official iceberg. The perceived (and often real) shortage of experienced personnel meant that many strategic posts within the new Pakistani bureaucracy were filled by British expatriates (frequently formerly employed by the British Indian authorities), whether at district, provincial, or federal level. Thomas, therefore, was part of a wider cohort; although, as will be explained, by the 1930s he no longer worked for the British Raj. For more details on the British civil and military personnel who worked for Pakistan after 1947, see the

Though undoubtedly a “big *zamindar*” himself, Thomas did not fit the label’s stereotypical image in mid-20th-century Sindh. Unlike most of his counterparts, as previously discussed, Thomas was an active exponent of “modernizing” agrarian production; thus, before 1947, he maintained contact with like-minded organizations and individuals across and beyond the subcontinent in order to identify ways of boosting agricultural potential. In late 1944, at the prompting of the then Governor of Sind, Sir Hugh Dow (who wrote sympathetically about the problem of landless agricultural laborers in Sindh in his own correspondence and periodically called for tenancy reform²⁵), the province’s Chief Minister, Sir Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah, appointed Thomas as Minister for Agriculture. But the appointment of an unelected European to ministerial office at precisely the time when nationalist demands were mounting was badly received, and so Hidayatullah, under pressure from the Muslim League’s all-India leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah, converted Thomas’s role to “Advisor to the Government of Sind in Agriculture and Post-War Development” within a month. Thomas held this post until 1952.²⁶

Muhammad Masud (1916–1985), a senior district officer and the only one of the committee’s five members who clashed openly with both Thomas and the committee’s majority findings, was the second key player in this story. Masud – later known as “Masud Khaddarposh” due to his advocacy for wearing homespun cotton cloth – was born in Lahore. Graduating with a law degree from Punjab University in 1937, Masud joined the Indian Civil Service in 1941 and proceeded to Oxford for further education and training. Upon his return to India, his first government posting was in Ahmadnagar, Bombay Presidency; from there, he was sent to Khandesh, another part of the Presidency, where his two years of work with Bhil *adivasis* is said to have earned him the title of “Masud Bhagwan.” In 1946, Masud was transferred to Nawabshah (in Sindh) as Deputy Commissioner, and he continued in the same post after August 1947, “opting” for Pakistan. Nawabshah, it should be noted, was one of the Sindhi districts most directly affected by the socio-economic impacts of Sukkur Barrage’s expanded irrigation opportunities.²⁷

On account of his open support for *hari* rights, Masud was evidently not well liked by many local politicians in the run-up to independence, as his stance clashed with their own landed interests. A report in the *Sind Observer* in June 1946, for instance, alleged that Masud had encouraged *haris* not to contribute produce to the payment of debts contracted by *zamindars*.²⁸ In similar fashion, the *Karachi Daily* (another newspaper sympathetic to landlord interests) described Masud in October 1946 as a “[pro-] Pakistani I.C.S. Collector. His main idiosyncrasy is landlordism. He is against zamindars, and he wants the suppressed *haris* to rise.”²⁹ As the 1946 elections approached, local Congress politicians, possibly concerned that Masud’s popularity

forthcoming study by Brandon D. Marsh (Bridgewater College, Virginia); and Uma Kothari, “From Colonialism to development: Reflections of former Colonial Officers,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 44, no. 1 (2006): 118–136.

²⁵ Dow’s correspondence while he was Governor of Sindh (1941–46) is available in Mss Eur E372 BL.

²⁶ Papers relating to Thomas’s appointment as Minister for Agriculture and as Agricultural Adviser, Mss Eur F235/221 BL.

²⁷ Government of India, *Census of India 1941*, vol. XII, 19.

²⁸ *Sind Observer*, June 21, 1946.

²⁹ *Karachi Daily*, October 18, 1946.

among *haris* would swing votes in favor of the Muslim League, mounted a campaign to get him transferred from Nawabshah. In response, a Sindhi vernacular, pro-Muslim League newspaper commented:

Mr. Masud's only offence is that he helped the poor *haris* against the powerful *zamindars* and saved them from their oppression and tyranny. The Hindu Press has therefore moved heaven and earth against Mr Masud ... The Hindu Congress has turned against him because he is attacking the vested interests and the *zamindars* ...³⁰

The Sindh Hari Committee (SHC), its leaders and supporters, was the third main actor in the drama that unfolded.³¹ Launched in 1930 at a meeting in Mirpurkhas by, among others, Jamshed Mehta, Jethmal Parsram Gulrajani, G.M. Syed, and Shaikh Abdul Majeed Sindhi, the organization focused on empowering peasants by giving them ownership rights and a membership fee set at only one anna. This initiative was connected to ongoing irrigation developments linked to the building of the barrage across the Indus, at Sukkur, which would soon increase opportunities for large-scale commercial agriculture in Sindh. By the time of independence, the SHC leadership lay with Hyder Bux Jatoi (1901–1970); it was he who spearheaded the *hari* response to the Committee of Enquiry's findings. Jatoi was a true "son of the soil," having been born in the village of Bakhodero near Mohenjodaro, in Larkana District.³² He was educated locally and is said to have matriculated in (overall) first place in Sindh, before completing his studies at DJ Science College, Karachi, in 1927 and entering the provincial civil service. Starting off as a clerk in the revenue department, he was promoted in 1931 to *mukhtiyarkar* (the revenue administrative officer in charge of obtaining taxation from a district's *taluka* or sub-division), eventually passing the necessary examinations to be appointed Deputy Collector in 1941.³³

In 1945, however, towards the end of the Second World War, Jatoi resigned his post specifically to campaign for the rights of the province's landless peasantry.³⁴ *Haris* were hit hard by wartime hardships, prompting allegations that *zamindars* were stooping "so low as to get hold of [*hari*] Ration-Cards ... and thereby [grabbing] a huge quantity of cloth, sugar, Kerosene etc.," resulting in *haris* being forced to make purchases on the black market.³⁵ In his later publications, including *Hari Inqilab*

³⁰ *Al Wahid*, October 13, 1948.

³¹ Ghulam Hussain and Anwaar Mohyuddin, 'Historical Sketch of Peasant Activism: tracing emancipatory political strategies of peasant activists of Sindh,' *International Journal Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 5 (September 2014): 23–42.

³² See Zaffar Junejo, "Peoples' Pamphleteer," *Friday Times*, May 29, 2020. For Jatoi's writings, see *Baba-e-Sindh Hyder Baksh Jatoi 1901–1970: Introduction and Excerpts from his Writings*, comp. and ed. Hatim Jatoi (Hyderabad: Hatim Jatoi, 1995), https://archive.org/details/san_0960/mode/2up (accessed March 27, 2024).

³³ *Mukhtiyarkar* is the Sindhi term for *tehsildar*, and likewise a *taluka* (sub-district) is what a *tehsil* is called in Sindh.

³⁴ Zaffar Iqbal Junejo, Azharudin Mohamed Dali, and Rashid Ali Khuhro, "Comrade Hyder Baksh Jatoi's Stitching Role in Pakistan's Patched Democracy, 1947–1969," *Research Journal of Social Sciences* 18 (2020): 75–93.

³⁵ "Hari Movement," n.d., in *The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action* (Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, Punjab, 1952), 127.

(1953) and *Sindh Hari Committee Fights for the People's Rights* (1955), Jatoi reiterated the Sindhi *haris'* dire plight, arguing that society could only develop if the power and strength of the peasantry was harnessed. Along with Thomas and Masud, Jatoi and his SHC comrades occupied a center-stage position in the debates on agrarian reform that gripped Sindh in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Between 1939–45, Sindh was drawn squarely into the wartime crisis, both as home to an enormous Allied military base in Karachi and, more generally, as a source of foodstuffs exportable to other parts of British India as and when required. In addition, shortages in essential goods, rationing, and black-market activities had brought the realities of the conflict home to people here, as elsewhere in South Asia.³⁶ Once the war was nearing its end, however, so-called improvement plans suspended in 1939 quickly resurfaced, and provincial governments began preparing for post-war reconstruction. As Sindh had acquired its separate provincial status only three years before the outbreak of conflict, its administration and politicians alike were especially keen (and expected) to bring the province up to speed on the development front. As Thomas explained at the time, “all development planning, be it industrial or otherwise, should center in [sic] agriculture and be considered as an aid thereto . . . Agricultural planning will be the keystone of Rural Development.”³⁷

At the start of 1945, with Allied victory on the horizon, the Sindh Cabinet decided the time had come to implement these policies; Sindh, it recognized, would have to rely mainly on its own financial resources, instead of waiting for problematic grants and subsidies from Delhi to support the province's draft Master Plan (comprised of 85 schemes under various development headings). But the local administration was also concerned with post-war resettlement and employment, and hence agreed that while “the Government should do what it can to accommodate non-Sindhi ex-servicemen on the land, both as peasant proprietors and *haris*, [. . .] land should not be given in this province as a reward for meritorious [sic] service to ex-servicemen of other provinces.” As Provincial Finance Secretary A.P. Le Mesurier reminded his ministers:

During the war years, the Government has been compelled to defer sanction to a number of items of administrative necessity, even of mere repair and maintenance. Police barracks, government offices, housing of government servants etc., all of which are a form of development, but which cannot properly find their place in “Planned Development,” will nevertheless produce demands on the resources of the Province which cannot be deferred.³⁸

³⁶ For details about the continuing impact of price controls, rationing, and corruption in post-1947 Sindh, see Sarah Ansari and William Gould, *Boundaries of Belonging: localities, citizenship and rights in India and Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Chapter 3. Z. A. Nizami, *Karachi Through the Centuries* (Karachi: Karachi Development Authority, 1987).

³⁷ Roger Thomas, “Development Planning,” December 1, 1944, Mss Eur F235/14 BL.

³⁸ *Government of Sind Post-War Development Schemes* (Karachi: Government Press, 1946), 28–32, Mss Eur F235/139 BL.

These challenges were subsequently summed up in an advisory report to the Sindh Cabinet in support of budget-related discussions in 1946, which drew attention to the huge backlog of repairs arising from the war, made worse by the legacy of severe flooding in the province in 1942. Although the proposed 1947–48 budget set aside a surplus of Rs. 96 lakhs (one lakh = 100,000) for post-war development, ministers were cautioned that the existence of surplus (on paper) was “no criterion of financial soundness.” Rather, six-monthly estimates pointed to a “disastrous” deficit of some Rs. 1.5 crores (one crore = 10,000,000).³⁹ This looming crisis called for an “urgent increase” in taxation revenue to Rs. 43 lakhs a year, rising “fairly certainly to 175 ultimately,” much of which would have to be collected from the countryside. If taxation on this scale was not acceptable, then the province would, Le Mesurier warned, “have to be content with less [sic] roads, dispensaries, schools, farms and so on.”⁴⁰

Once the war was actually over, the Sindh authorities decided that, moving forward, economic plans would fall into the following broad categories: those that were directly productive and remunerative, such as irrigation and hydroelectric projects, and those that were not, such as education and public health. From an official perspective, agricultural schemes lay halfway between the two, behind only irrigation and roads in terms of urgency, with the main objectives being the increase of vital crops’ average yields and bringing more land under cultivation. Success would depend on devising “ways and means of developing the great potential wealth of the province through *increased productivity* [emphasis added].” Idleness was not deemed a factor standing in the way of a more productive countryside: while “the Sindhi cultivator has the reputation amongst the unknowing of being lazy,” the report acknowledged that this was “an unkind and unfair aspersion.”⁴¹ Instead, it laid blame for such negative stereotypes on the pervasiveness of “primitive” agricultural practices directly connected to the uncertainties generated by land tenure arrangements, for “with rare exceptions, they [*haris*] have no security of tenure in the lands they cultivate.” Remedying this would be the first step to driving up production and securing the future financial wellbeing of the province as a whole.⁴²

The proposal of constructing another large barrage at Kotri, just south of Hyderabad, in Lower Sindh, was another planning-related issue that generated energetic discussion in the province during the short interlude between the end of the war and independence. This irrigation project (as Haines has pointed out) underlined the intimate connection between development and politics: from the Sindh authorities’ perspective, the province had to push ahead with irrigations schemes “or perish.”⁴³ A conference held in Karachi in July 1946 noted that the project

³⁹ Finance Secretary, Notes for the Cabinet, Budget for 1947–48, Karachi, December 28, 1946, Mss Eur F235/139 BL.

⁴⁰ Finance Department, Note for Cabinet, October 30, 1946, Mss Eur F 235/139 BL.

⁴¹ As Cheesman points out in his classic study of the impact of British rule on the Sindhi countryside in the second half of the 19th century, the supposed “laziness” of the *hari* was directly linked to the insecurity of their tenure. See Cheesman, *Landlord power*, 74–77.

⁴² Government of Sind, *Post-War Development Schemes (1947–48–1951–52)*, 2nd ed. (Karachi: Government Press, 1947), 3, 8, 78.

⁴³ Daniel Haines, *Building the Empire, Building the Nation: Development, Legitimacy, and Hydro-Politics in Sind, 1919–1969* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Statement showing the “Three Questions of General Policy,” March 5, 1945, Mss Eur F235/139 BL.

raised all sorts of quandaries around how the construction would be carried out, bearing in mind the apparent reluctance in some Sindhi quarters to hire workers from outside the province. Ministers present agreed “that in order to obtain competent men on the necessary scale, the preference at present given to Sindhis would probably have to be relaxed,” and accepted the need for a “relaxation of [the] present rules regarding domicile.”⁴⁴ As this statement reveals, sensitivities around who would do what in terms of developing the Sindhi countryside had existed before Partition, which only served to further complicate the picture, triggering as it did the arrival, particularly in early 1948, of landless East Punjabi refugees.⁴⁵

In 1948, after independence and the population displacement linked with Partition, Thomas himself raised the new challenges posed by the arrival of large numbers of outsiders with the (by then) Governor of the Punjab, Sir Francis Mudie.⁴⁶ From Mudie’s perspective,

the refugee problem, which has increased the pressure on the soil, has brought to the fore the problem of tenancy rights etc., which had not hitherto much worried the Punjab. These are being taken up by the Refugee Department. This refugee problem has also made it essential to have the same system in the Punjab as in Sind, as refugees will expect the same rights whichever Province they settle in.⁴⁷

Later that year, British High Commission officials noted that “the arrival of further refugees from the West Punjab [had] inflamed latent Provincial jealousy of the Punjabi immigrant, and serious tension is reported to exist between the local Sindhi peasants and the refugees.” Moreover, “quarrels over the allocation of land are frequent and an allegation is that the local authorities are playing on the feelings of the peasantry in order to avoid disgorging evacuee land and property which they have seized and which the Central Government now [wants] for refugees.”⁴⁸

Against the backdrop of dealing with the demographic fallout from Partition, the fledgling Pakistani authorities at both the provincial and federal level placed enormous emphasis on developing the resources of the new state, and “progress,” whether linked to agriculture or industry, was the talk of the day. Hence, the Pakistani state’s close identification with, and sponsorship of, programs and projects regarded as crucial to this quest. At every opportunity, the state’s leaders sought to drive home a suitably forward-looking message. When Pakistan’s Governor-General and “founding father,” Jinnah, died in September 1948, it was quickly decided that the

⁴⁴ Lower Sind Barrage Project, July 2, 1946, Mss Eur F235/121 BL.

⁴⁵ Sarah Ansari, “Partition, Migration and Refugees: responses to the arrival of Muhajirs in Sind after 1947,” in *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence*, eds. D.A. Low and H. Brasted (Armistead: Sage, 1998), 91–105. As early as April 1945, discussions were taking place on how and where to settle ex-servicemen on land set aside under the Lower Sindh barrage scheme. This included possibly setting up a chain of villages for non-Sindhi military colonists stretching from just north of Sanghar to the Jamrao Head, a part of Sindh still experiencing the aftershocks of the recent Hur uprising of the war years. See H.T. Lambrick to Roger Thomas, April 7, 1945, Mss Eur F235/134 BL.

⁴⁶ Mudie was the last colonial-era governor of Sindh in 1946–47, and so knew Thomas personally.

⁴⁷ Mudie to Thomas, October 5, 1948, Mss Eur F235/260 BL.

⁴⁸ UKHC Opdom No. 88, October 29 to November 4, 1948, L/PO/12/14 BL.

Quaid-i-Azam Memorial Fund would be established to finance various good works, including the establishment of the National Institute for Technology, where training in different branches of engineering were to be imparted “to the highest standards.”⁴⁹ Things in this brave new (technological) world did not always go according to plan, however. November 1, 1948, for instance, was the date set for the inaugural ceremony of the state’s first 10 kilowatt medium-wave radio transmitter, necessary for expanding the listener range of Radio Pakistan. However, while the transmitter’s installation was claimed to have been carried out in record time, just six weeks, the occasion itself was “marred by the failure of electric current in the studio during the Minister of the Interior’s address,” and thus his speech could not be broadcast.⁵⁰

The harsh reality, however, was that the new Pakistani administration found it very difficult to meet its people’s everyday needs, and most Pakistanis experienced a shortage of basic items and rationing in the years following independence. Food deficits represented an especially worrying issue, further aggravated by another episode of severe flooding in Upper Sindh in 1948 that left 150,000 homeless and some 1,600 square miles under water (with large landowners in West Punjab widely believed to be hoarding grain during this emergency). Pakistan found itself going “cap in hand” to international bodies – such as the International Emergency Food Council – and its allies (the US in particular) for assistance.⁵¹ Increasing food production was more urgent than ever.

* * *

The decision to set up the Hari Committee of Enquiry in early 1947 cannot have taken contemporaries by complete surprise. An “*adho adh* [half-half] *batai*” campaign calling for reform had started in Sindh during the war, resulting in the authorities initiating an enquiry into tenancy arrangements in 1944.⁵² However, while most members of this earlier committee supported some reworking of tenancy rights, no action followed. On that occasion, there were two dissenting voices: G.M. Syed, who recommended that the *zamindari* system be totally abolished, and Djalmaul Daulatram (an MLA, like Syed, and substantial landholder himself), who warned that tenancy reform risked “the danger of unduly disturbing the rural economy without any material advantages accruing to the hari class,” and so granting “permanent rights of tenure would be for the greater part illusionary.”⁵³ In the febrile post-war atmosphere, with nationalist pressure mounting, the campaign to reform *batai* arrangements was relaunched in 1946, in particular in the districts of Nawabshah, Sanghar, Larkana, and Sukkur. The struggle caught the public imagination, most

⁴⁹ UKHC Opdom No. 76, September 17–23, 1948, L/PO/12/14 BL.

⁵⁰ UKHC Opdom No. 88, October 29 to November 4, 1948, L/PO/12/14 BL.

⁵¹ UKHC Monthly Appreciation of the General Situation, No 9, September 1948, L/PO/12/14 BL.

⁵² *Batai* = share distribution, according to which produce is shared by the landowner and tenant.

⁵³ *Report of the Tenancy Legislation Committee* (Karachi: Government Press, 1945), referenced in Chapter II, *Report of the Government Hari Enquiry Committee 1947–48* (Karachi: Government Press, 1948). Shahani highlights that there was a clear communal dimension involved in attempted land rights-related legislation during the war years, quoting the then Governor of Sindh, Dow, who described such attempts as “highly communal and contentious.” See Uttara Shahani, *Sind and the Partition of India, c. 1927–1952* (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2018), 102.

notably thanks to the death of Mai Bakhtawar, an elderly woman who many believed was killed by a “Punjabi *zamindar*” while guarding her share of grain.⁵⁴

The establishment of the Hari Committee of Enquiry also exposed continuing paradoxes in provincial politics, however. While Sindh’s creation as a separate province in 1936 generated new political opportunities, it also reinforced existing trends. Among other continuities, Sindh’s extremely powerful *zamindar* interests were able to combine their control over huge swathes of land and the people working it with political dominance in the new provincial legislative assembly. The basis of most Sindhi politicians’ power and influence lay in the countryside; their *zamindar* connections were evident and inescapable. Furthermore, Sindh, as a Muslim-majority province, had come to occupy a strategic place within all-India Muslim League campaigning in the run up to independence. Winning over this province electorally was crucial to the League’s cause, which happened when post-war polls in 1945–46 returned a pro-League ministry led by Hidayatullah, helping to legitimize wider demands for some kind of separate political arrangement (“Pakistan”) to safeguard future Muslim interests in South Asia.⁵⁵ This meant that the League sought to maintain a good working relationship with local Sindhi Muslim politicians, many of whom belonged to influential *zamindar* families. Yet, at the same time, the League also needed to consolidate longer-term support among more “ordinary” Muslims, who – in Sindh – inevitably included a large proportion of *haris*. If later reports are accurate, Jinnah went so far as to state that the uplift of cultivators in the province was “the foremost necessity of the day,” without which “the communistic influence was likely to spread very fast over [its] rural population.”⁵⁶ In March 1947, when Pakistan was still not a “done deal,” Hidayatullah – encouraged by Jinnah in particular – decided to initiate another official investigation into tenancy arrangements in the province: its final membership eventually comprised Thomas (as chairman), N.M.A. Siddiqi (bureaucrat and landlord), Khan Sahib G.S. Kehar (landlord), R.S. Gopichand (landowner), and the afore mentioned Masud, whose official duties meant he was often unable to attend the committee’s meetings in Karachi.

The Hari Committee of Enquiry operated in classic fashion, holding meetings over a period stretching from March 1947 to early 1948. Thomas led proceedings, gathering information from both within the country and abroad. Other members, apart from Masud, mostly went along with whatever Thomas recommended, only occasionally disagreeing with the chair. But Masud, as the committee’s minutes testify, turned out to be a consistent thorn in Thomas’s side, from urging changes to the committee’s initial terms of reference to challenging its working procedures. Their disagreement over the terms of reference reveals the basic difference of opinion between the two men, and helps explain why the committee reached the eventual divided conclusion it did. Whereas Masud was clearly hoping for reform that would restructure agrarian relationships in the Sindhi countryside, Thomas interpreted the committee’s remit to

⁵⁴ “The History of the Hari Movement in Sind,” in *The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action*, 131–140. The note, which was produced circa March 1949, was originally written in Urdu and later translated into English.

⁵⁵ Hidayatullah had been Premier since 1942 but, in the run up to independence, he nailed his colors firmly to the Muslim League mast.

⁵⁶ *Civil and Military Gazette*, March 29, 1951.

hinge on finding ways to increase the province's agrarian potential. As the minutes of the committee's first meeting in March 1947 attest, its recommendations were meant to "lead to a higher standard of agriculture and to an increase in the productivity of the land."⁵⁷ What was important for Thomas was not who would own the land, but how the land would be farmed. In his view, the reform of "contractual relations" between landlords and tenants was the necessary first step towards expanding agricultural output, and he rejected the (potentially messy) reallocation of ownership rights precisely because mechanization – a crucial determinant of this enhanced efficiency – demanded larger units of land than the small handful of acres farmed by most *haris*. In Thomas's response to Masud's objections in October 1947, he pointed out that the terms of reference were primarily concerned with alleged *hari* grievances and how to resolve these, so as to improve their standard of living. By the same token, Thomas stressed that the committee "should not overlook the need for ensuring that its recommendations would lead to a higher standard of agriculture and increases in the productivity of land."⁵⁸ Thomas wanted a unanimous report from the outset, but if this was impossible, then its members were at liberty to submit minutes of dissent, preferably confined to differences over major issues.

Progress reaching an agreed set of recommendations certainly proved slower than originally expected. By October 1947, the committee's initial attempt to generate evidence through distributing a questionnaire had resulted (unsurprisingly, considering the Partition-related disruptions of the previous six months) in a meagre reaction: out of 230 questionnaires sent out, only 43 replies were received. In response, it was decided that oral evidence would be collected from a select and smaller number of witnesses, mostly *zamindars* and/or members of the Sindh Legislative Assembly (SLA), with only a handful of *hari* representatives interviewed, including Hyder Bux Jatoo and Abdul Kadir, editor of the *Hari Hakdar* newspaper that had begun publication in Hyderabad in 1947.⁵⁹

The committee's Majority Report, presented to the Sindh government in July 1948, did draw attention to existing inequalities present in the Sindh countryside and *haris'* resulting personal and economic liabilities. It would have been hard for the report not to do so. By the late 1940s, *haris* made up over half of the province's total rural population of circa 3.6 million. Not only were they expected to pay half the produce of the land to *zamindars*, but landlords typically deducted various levies or *abwabs*, further reducing the *haris'* share of any profit.⁶⁰ In addition, payment for guarding crops before harvesting, weighing crops after harvesting, lighting for when crop irrigation took place at night, and so on, were all paid by *haris*, who also had to provide bullocks and buy seeds. As tenants-at-will who could be dismissed at any time, this vulnerability was made even more precarious by the fact that, as most

⁵⁷ Minutes of Meetings, March 14, 1947, Mss Eur F235/261 BL.

⁵⁸ Minutes of Meetings, October 17, 1947, Mss Eur F235/261 BL.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ For a translated copy of an undated (pre-independence) so-called "Communist Leaflet" agitating for the stopping of *abwabs*, see Mss Eur F235/268 BL. The leaflet, which named and shamed individual *zamindars* who had deprived *haris* of their rightful half of the harvest, also explained the next steps *haris* should take if their rights were disregarded. It ended by calling upon *haris* to "Be the sepoy of the red army and bring an end to oppression," and referred to them acquiring land ownership rights "in the time to come."

contracts were oral, *haris* had no legal recourse if a dispute took place: "Government officials are beyond [the *hari*'s] reach, his landlord is the final arbiter of his fate."⁶¹ Besides, while

inwardly they [*haris*] deplore the heavy extraction from their share of crops, the heavy infantile mortality, and the incidence of disease in their families, the loss of their bullocks by theft/disease, the shortage of essential domestic/consumer goods, their own illiteracy and lack of education, the heavy demands of social customs on their hard-earned incomes, and various other disabilities which are their present lot . . . having no collective voice, they stoically endure these hardships imposed by the prevailing socio-economic system.⁶²

To observers sympathetic to *hari* hardships, it was surprising that, after drawing such a dismal picture of living conditions in rural Sindh, the committee did not recommend reforms that would substantially raise incomes and improve living conditions. Instead, the Majority Report suggested that *hari* problems were either of their own creation, natural, or the result of government neglect; the landlord was the *hari*'s friend. From the committee's majority perspective, land redistribution was not only undesirable, but would represent a loss for the *hari*: "It is a moot point whether any attempt should be made to change his [the *hari*'s] sense of values as to what constitutes happiness."⁶³ In effect, while there could and should have been (some) reform, the bottom line was that *haris* would remain tenants, with land ownership and the associated wider control over people's lives still firmly in the hands of landlords. This outcome frustrated contemporaries who had hoped for more from the committee: one response suggested that, while the proposed tenancy legislation was touted as giving *haris* an opportunity to stand on their own, "for [them] to stand erect . . . zamindars should first get off their backs."⁶⁴ According to the Majority Report, however, Sindh was in more urgent need of stable tenancy arrangements, not land redistribution, as the former would support more developed agricultural practices and raise productivity, aspirations totally in line with the long-held views of its primary author, Thomas. Importantly, reform for Thomas was all about maximum gain with minimal disruption. "Stability," in his view, was best ensured by revising existing tenancy arrangements between *hari* and *zamindar*. What Thomas and his supporters feared was the disruption, or instability, that they believed would result from a more radical root-and-branch redistribution scheme.

In March 1949, the Sindh authorities published a bill announcing legislation to regulate both tenants and landlords' rights and liabilities in the province.⁶⁵ Shouting slogans such as "*zamindari khatam karo*" (end *zamindari*), *hari* representatives conducted a mock funeral in front of the SLA as debate took place the following spring.⁶⁶ When the Sind Tenancy Act was passed in April 1950, however, despite efforts by opponents (such as M.A. Khuhro) to hold up proceedings for another year, its contents focused on the duties of tenants and *zamindars* and how produce was to

⁶¹ *Civil and Military Gazette*, June 10, 1949.

⁶² *Report of the Government Hari Enquiry Committee 1947-48*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Dawn*, May 11, 1948.

⁶⁵ *Sind Government Gazette*, Karachi, March 3, 1949, pt IV, Legal Department.

⁶⁶ *Dawn*, April 4, 1950.

be divided between them, rather than introducing more basic change. The Karachi-based Urdu-language daily *Jang* described the legislation as “thoroughly defective and inadequate,” and efforts to prop it up as a charter of rights as “ridiculous.”⁶⁷ On April 7, the SHC denounced the act as the “reactionary” perpetuation of *zamindar* exploitation.⁶⁸

One member of the committee had dissented with the majority opinion, Masud, who refused to add his name to the report. Instead, Masud chose to produce a “Note of Dissent,” as originally permitted, which was presented to the authorities in July 1948.⁶⁹ What Masud had not predicted, however, was that the authorities would keep his opinion from the public. As one British observer later commented, “the suppression by the Government of the minority report by one member of the Committee appointed to examine the agrarian question ... attracted much attention,” particularly from among the authorities’ critics.⁷⁰ For instance, the *Pakistan Times* (then still a left-leaning publication) noted very pointedly that “The only justification for what time and money was spent on the Hari Committee seems to be this minority report.”⁷¹ *Dawn*, the English-language and pro-refugee daily published in Karachi, drew attention to the “feeling among sections of the public that the Sind Ministry, whose parliamentary support is largely derived from *Zamindar* elements, may not only shelve the minority report of the Hari Committee but even withhold it from the public.”⁷²

Masud – whose note described the condition of the *haris* as deplorable, differences between landlord and tenant as too severe and unfair, and land reforms as absolutely necessary – called for the complete abolition of the *zamindari* system, for landlords to receive minimum compensation for their expropriated land, and for the state to hold absolute ownership of the land. For him, resolving tenancy arrangements along these lines was a necessary step if Pakistan was to solve its post-Partition challenges:

I believe that we can take several lacs [lakhs] of refugees provided we overhaul our land tenure system. The shortage of agricultural labour in Sind has been due to the existing insecurity of the tenant, this factor in turn has discouraged immigration, and now the shortage of labour has been accentuated by the exodus of about two lacs of Koli, Bhil and Mainghwar [non-Muslims] *haris*. Tharparkar district is threatened with a big drop in the cultivated area this year and consequently a serious fall in food production as well as State revenues. The refugees could fill this gap, but they are prevented from settling in Sind by the complete insecurity of tenure and hostile surroundings. A situation such as this threatens the prosperity and productivity of the whole of Sind, and in Sind’s own interest more than anything else, it is necessary that a

⁶⁷ Quoted in *Dawn*, March 28, 1950.

⁶⁸ *Dawn*, April 7, 1949.

⁶⁹ M. Masud, Hari Committee Report Note of Dissent, Mss Eur F235/650 BL. It was republished later as M. Masud, *Hari Report: Note of Dissent* (Karachi: Hari Publications, circa. 1973), and is available in an updated 2007 edition at <http://www.masudkhaddarposhtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/HARI-REPORT-REPRINT-Final-June-2007.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2024).

⁷⁰ UKHC Opdom 104, December 24–30, 1948, L/PO/12/14 BL.

⁷¹ *Pakistan Times*, May 21, 1948.

⁷² *Dawn*, July 14, 1948.

new approach should be made to the problem. By the expropriation of zamindars and the creation of peasant proprietorship Sind will not only solve the problem of its 20 lacs [lakhs] *haris* but also help the cause of refugee resettlement on a very large scale, which is the foremost problem of Pakistan.

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 husbandry, and who would have a desire born of prosperity to better their standard of living . . . The State alone as the universal landowner will be able to provide the means by which every man, from labourers upward, may procure suitable land for his personal occupation . . . ⁷³

In his desire to encourage the province's development, and by extension Pakistan's development as a whole, Masud saw himself fully in agreement with his committee colleagues. He claimed, for instance, to be equally committed to precisely the mechanized technologies that Thomas was strongly recommending. Where he deviated from Thomas and the others related to who would own the land. According to Masud, the committee's first and original priority had been to create peasant proprietorship, particularly in recently released irrigated barrage lands. But the Majority Report instead recommended that the authorities, at least initially, should simply demarcate and reserve for their own use any land that might be required for future collaborative farming (a pet project of Thomas's) or some other form of state management. This, Masud maintained, was contrary to the wishes of most committee members, by implication suggesting that they had been overruled by the chair. Only once a class of peasant proprietors had been created did Masud believe that any remaining land could be handed over, whether to a system of state management or for collaborative farming. As he explained, "zamindari [must] be replaced by peasant proprietorship. No less radical a reform will get rid of the widespread evils of our present system." Immediate expropriation of big estates and those owned by non-cultivating owners was required.⁷⁴

Protest at the withholding of Masud's Note of Dissent quickly surfaced, with younger Muslim League members and students calling on the provincial party and district Muslim League committees to pass resolutions demanding its publication. The President of the All-Pakistan Muslim League, Chaudhry Khaliqzaman, likewise appealed to the Sindh governor, urging him to intervene and have the provincial government yield to public demand.⁷⁵ In a further twist to the note's reception, a pamphlet signed by 16 *ulama*, led by Maulana Abdul Hamid Badayuni (President of Jamiat-ul Ulama-i-Pakistan), alleged that the content of Masud's note was "un-Islamic" and its writer had "communist" leanings.⁷⁶ Conversely, some commentators

⁷³ Masud, Hari Committee Report Note of Dissent, Chapter 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Dawn*, January 4, 1949.

⁷⁶ The Jamiat-ul Ulama-i-Pakistan was established in March 1948 in Multan by leaders of the All-India Sunni Conference (founded 1925) to represent Sunni Sufi ("Barelvi") interests in Pakistan. Its major support bases lay in Sindh and the Punjab. Masud's note contained a whole chapter in which he argued the opposite of what this pamphlet alleged, namely that Islam justified and supported the reforms he was advocating.

suggested that any *ulama* justification of the *zamindari* would surely “drive the masses away from religion.”⁷⁷ Once Masud had established that it was a Sindh government minister who passed his Note of Dissent to the clerics (having allegedly made them an attractive offer to write a *fatwa* against it), Masud took legal action, claiming 500,000 rupees in damages for defamation. This move prompted the central government to intervene. With a new Chief Minister, Yusuf Haroon, who was less reliant on landed support than his immediate predecessor (Pir Ilahi Bakhsh), the Sindh authorities were finally persuaded to publish the note on June 20, 1949.⁷⁸

As its opening statement made clear, Masud’s defense of the *hari* was a full-bodied attack on the *status quo*:

They are human beings, and as such, rational animals, and though they drudge like domesticated animals, they enjoy no privileges of rationality, nor any rights of human beings. Such are the *haris* of Sind, who form the bulk of its population, who till the land and give Sind the distinguished name of Granary of Pakistan.⁷⁹

Reference by Masud to the *haris*’ humanity, rather than simply relying on questions of legal equity, highlighted the almost racialized notions of “backwardness” that underpinned much thinking about their potential as cultivators.⁸⁰ Thomas, evidently frustrated by the fallout from Masud’s note and the longer-term reception of the Majority Report, continued to insist that an impartial study of the latter’s 141 pages would reveal that “the recommendations of the Committee in their totality [underlined in the original] will bring more material benefits to *haris* than are demanded by their leaders.”⁸¹ Indeed, according to Thomas’s vision of how conditions in the countryside would progress, the *zamindar* (albeit a presumably more

⁷⁷ “Justification of Zamindari by Ulema will drive masses away from religion, says Ghaznavi,” *Dawn*, April 1, 1949. The suggestion of turning *haris* away from religion was robustly refuted in a report on a later *hari* convention: “The turbaned and bearded Sindhis sat cross-legged comfortably in their chairs and a number of them kept telling their beads all the time. Next time when anyone tells us that the Communists make people irreligious, we shall take it not with a pinch of salt but with a handful of it.” See Abdul Khaliq Azad, “Sind *Haris* on the March,” n.d., in *The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action*, 141–146.

⁷⁸ *Dawn*, June 21, 1949.

⁷⁹ Masud, *Hari Committee Report Note of Dissent*, Chapter 1.

⁸⁰ Ideas about backwardness formed part of the long-standing and persistent colonial-era discourse around supposedly innate Sindh characteristics that impeded agricultural productivity in the province, and which sharply distinguished the qualities of the Sindh *hari* from their Punjabi counterpart in the eyes of unsympathetic observers both during and after the colonial era.

⁸¹ Sir Roger Thomas to Editor, *Sind Observer*, January 31, 1949, Mss Eur F235/260 BL. In a separate though not completely disconnected initiative, the Sindh government decided later in 1949 to abolish the *jagirdar* system in the province, thereby potentially re-routing some Rs. 20 lakhs of land revenue to government coffers. Ministers, however, were quick to distance this proposal from ongoing discussion on the future of *zamindari*: “The question of the abolition of *zamindari* in Sind . . . does not arise at the present moment as the aftereffect will be fraught with various difficulties.” See “Sind to abolish *Jagirdar*,” *Dawn*, September 22, 1949. As Khan has pointed out, there was enormous irony in how Thomas defended the Majority Report in the press: “the *hari* was deprived of tenancy rights because of the prevailing faith in custom but at the same time [he] was denied the status of customary protections because he was no more than ‘a worker’. But then if the *hari* was no more than a worker, then why should he not be given protections under the law as a laborer?” See Khan, *Empire, Law and Order-Making*, 222.

“enlightened” one) still had a decisive role to play. In this respect, Thomas’s belief regarding how to raise agricultural productivity in Sindh depended on continuing structural inequality in terms of land ownership and who ultimately called the shots.

Under Jatoi’s leadership, the SHC renewed its efforts to raise public awareness of the harsh realities of the *hari* plight. At a *hari* gathering on March 14, 1949, the point was made (by SHC Secretary, Abdul Qadir) that redistributing land in Sindh would not only be just but also solve the most important problem facing Pakistan, refugee rehabilitation, as well as yield better revenue for the government. Jatoi addressed the question of mechanization as follows: “machinery in itself is a blessing but when the ownership remains in the hands of the Capitalist class, the machines serve the interest of [that] class alone and the labourers merely remain one of the factors of production.” The lack of *hari* representation in the SLA was also strongly critiqued: “Not that the Hari does not have a vote but what with the fear of the Zamindar and the canvassing for votes done on behalf of the Zamindars by mobilizing Pirs and Maulvies [sic], how can the Hari exercise his vote freely, under these circumstances?”⁸² As a report on the meeting concluded,

The haris of Sindh are once again on the march, and . . . this time they are determined to assert themselves and achieve their rights. We trust the Government will see the writing on the wall. It will not do to explain away the agitation of our masses as a “Red Menace”, the real menace is the “Zamindari Menace” and this must be ended, else it would end many.⁸³

Alongside the total abolition of the *zamindari* without compensation and *haris* being given hereditary rights to the land they plough without time qualifications, the SHC demands included universal, free, and compulsory education and new provincial elections held on the basis of the adult franchise brought with independence.⁸⁴ To press these home, more than 15,000 peasants from across the province conducted a “sit-in” outside SLA buildings. Meanwhile, from the perspective of local Communist Party activists (before the party was banned in Pakistan), the problem of tenancy reform was part and parcel of a bigger set of issues confronting people in Sindh:

The rise and fall of Minsters in Sind, the disastrous floods that could have been prevented, the practice of smuggling food rains across the borders leading to food shortage in a surplus province, the bribery and corruption rampant in the administration, the bungling policy in settling refugees, the wide-spread chaos that is haunting the province, all these things are not accidental but form an integral part of the Zamindari system, and can only end with it.⁸⁵

Despite the official fanfare that greeted the Sind Tenancy Act in some quarters in 1950, the legislation failed to make much appreciable difference to the lives of *haris*, as

⁸² Azad, “Sind Haris on the March.”

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ “Haris want hereditary rights on land and substitution of batai system by cash rent,” *Dawn*, April 23, 1949; and “Sind Hari Committee’s demands,” *Dawn*, July 16, 1949.

⁸⁵ “Hari Problem in Sind,” in *The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action*, 128.

both Masud and the SHC had anticipated. The act's contents focused primarily on the respective duties of tenants and *zamindars* and how produce was divided between them. By March 1951, the recently reappointed Sindh Chief Minister, M.A. Khuhro (a prominent landholder himself), declared – to the disbelief of some observers – that there was no *hari* problem in the province; it only existed in “some newspaper offices.” Instead, thanks to recent irrigation developments that increased the amount of farmable land and, subsequently, generated a shortage of workers, he suggested that it was actually “poor zamindars [who] were vying with each other to secure the services of *haris*.”⁸⁶ As one press report commented, “what Mr Khuhro did not say [was] that he was determined to make his ‘poor zamindars’ richer and the ‘rich hari’ poorer.”⁸⁷ Speaker after speaker at a well-attended public *hari* meeting in Hyderabad condemned the SLA as a body representing only vested interests, as the peasant class that comprised the vast majority of the province's population was completely unrepresented: “Nothing short of the immediate dissolution of the Assembly and new elections on the basis of universal franchise would satisfy the peasants.”⁸⁸ As Jatoi argued, “in spite of 15 years of service of the Hari Committee for the cause of *haris*, they are still at the mercy of *zamindars* and have no proprietary interest in the land and the Tenancy Act passed last year has still not been enforced till now.”⁸⁹

The early 1950s witnessed continuing *hari* protests.⁹⁰ In February 1952, a six-man Hari Committee Deputation headed by Jatoi presented a memorandum to Sindh governor Din Mohammed, demanding greater tenancy rights on land that they were cultivating and highlighting the need for amendments to the Sind Tenancy Act. During their two-hour meeting, the delegation explained how time restrictions and the acreage proposed in the act would involve *haris* being in constant litigation, thereby undermining the legislation's purpose. In a similar spirit, the delegation called for the annulment of sections in the act that provided loopholes for landlords to harass *haris*. Another suggested amendment was for cash rental to replace the *batai* system. In response, the governor assured *hari* representatives that they would not be hindered in their political work provided it remained constitutional.⁹¹ But this was not what Jatoi and his colleagues wanted to hear. Calling once more for the abolition of *zamindari* holdings, *hari* leaders reiterated their demands, while also reassuring refugee agriculturalists of their “fraternal feelings” and accusing *zamindars* of creating differences between *haris* and *muhajirs* (as refugees were commonly known).⁹²

What made the matter especially urgent in the early 1950s was the worsening food situation in parts of the province, as well as Pakistan more generally. People from Tharparker district on the Indian border were trekking into towns and cities because of the soaring price of food grains. This was an “artificial” scarcity, *hari* activists claimed, created by “bogus syndicates and large-scale smuggling.” Grain depots run by the authorities were being “mishandled,” and there was a need for “price control”

⁸⁶ Dawn, March 28, 1951.

⁸⁷ Civil and Military Gazette, March 30, 1951.

⁸⁸ Civil and Military Gazette, February, 1951.

⁸⁹ Civil and Military Gazette, March 30, 1951.

⁹⁰ Dawn, January 27, 1952.

⁹¹ Dawn, February 3, 1952.

⁹² Dawn, February 4, 1952.

and “cheap grain shops” instead.⁹³ At a July 1952 conference in Umarkot (in Tharparkar), reportedly attended by nearly 20,000 people and presided over by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, then Secretary of the All-Pakistan Confederation of Labour, the organizers issued another call for abolishing the *zamindari* system and congratulated the Sindh governor on recently dissolving what they described as the latest “corrupt” Sindh ministry. The *zamindari* system had to be ended without compensation and land allotted to “toilers of soil [sic]” on an equitable basis.⁹⁴

The knowledge that “vast tracts of land” were to soon become available for development – particularly once the Lower Sindh Barrage, by then under construction, was ready – underpinned the authorities’ reluctance to carry out more radical agrarian reform in the early 1950s. Demand was so high – with A and B class land fetching over Rs. 300 per acre and even lower quality C class land being sold at Rs. 240 – that the authorities had a great deal riding financially on sales in the barrage area. As one critic pointed out, the proceeds of land sales already contributed a sizeable proportion of the provincial budget, and thus the government was unlikely to voluntarily part with this source of income:

The result is that subject to payment of full price it [the government] is creating fresh zamindari every year with the same heritable and transferable rights. Now may we ask: is it fair to create fresh zamindari on the one hand and encourage the move for the abolition of zamindari on the other?⁹⁵

There was also the continuing issue of how to settle refugee agriculturalists. As the same correspondent pointed out, the messy politics following Partition had complicated relationships on the ground, as refugee cultivators – including those with property left behind in India – now competed with Sindhis over the allocation of agricultural land, whether land belonging to migrating Hindus or made available by irrigation projects. But the refugee presence in the countryside was also viewed as a way of addressing the “development” deficit, as it was assumed they would drive up agricultural productivity:

The province faces a labour problem. In many places it is difficult to get or retain Haris. Every year we have hundreds and thousands of labourers from outside the Province to meet our requirement [sic]. If the Government of Sind were to follow an honest, forward and progressive policy and were to offer the barrage lands . . . the three main problems of the Province would be solved. The Haris and Muhajirs would have all the land they need and solve the rehabilitation problem. The zamindars would [not get] Haris to cultivate their lands on Batai system and would only be too glad to let out their lands on a fair cash rental. Thus, the Zamindar-Hari struggle would vanish. With such a measure adopted, the Government will not necessarily be a loser. It will have doubled its land under cultivation giving a Philip [sic] to the Grow More Food scheme, and revenue would increase.⁹⁶

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Dawn*, July 11, 1952.

⁹⁵ Abdul Jabbar Abbasi, “Zamindari in Sind,” *Dawn*, September 1, 1952.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

In the meantime, the governor assured refugees that they would soon be granted semi-permanent tenancy rights on lands allotted to them, which would ultimately be made permanent. All the same, he took pains to underline that this scheme would neither affect *haris* nor limit their access to land.⁹⁷

In August 1952, headlines in the province's newspapers read: "Relief for 20 Lakh *haris*. New Sind Tenancy Act promulgated." What this fanfare amounted to, however, was only a change in rules around the eviction of *haris*. As a 1951 report compiled by US officials underlined, the passage of legislation in Sindh was leading to the "widespread eviction of tenants."⁹⁸ According to the 1950 act, a *hari* could be evicted for cattle theft, receiving stolen cattle, abduction, robbery or dacoity, or stealing his landlord's crop. The revised legislation amended this by restricting eviction to those convicted in court for stealing their landlord's crops.⁹⁹ By 1955, however, when another US report was compiled, tangible progress in addressing the *hari* predicament had still not been made: since "a *hari* has [to] apply for his . . . rights, and due to unawareness of the law or fear of the landlord, not 5% of the *haris* have gained [them] since the passage of the Tenancy Act." Such ambiguities permitted "the landholder to follow the letter if not the spirit of the law," which was itself "emasculated by evasive language."¹⁰⁰

That same year, Jatoi issued yet another unequivocal statement on behalf of *hari* rights. In *Sindh Hari Committee Fights for the People's Rights* (1955), he repeated his argument that the *zamindari* system needed to be abolished, pointing out that the recently completed Lower Sindh (Ghulam Mohammed) Barrage at Kotri (near Hyderabad) represented an opportunity to create state-owned agricultural farms. But rather than creating a new landlord class, the opportunities generated by this irrigation expansion should be made available to Sindh's peasants on the basis of affordable instalments. In the words of his 1957 publication, *Lands in Sindh - who should own them?*, land belonged to the tiller.¹⁰¹ Masud, in the interim, had continued to stir controversy. In 1957, as Rehabilitation Secretary in the West Pakistan government, he led a movement to have Eid prayers recited in Urdu (rather than Arabic) in Lahore's Bagh-i Jinnah: "It is an insult to God," he told a newspaper interviewer, "to stand before Him and say something that you do not understand." As a US report went on, Masud "once again aligned himself with iconoclasts - this time, as usually, in wholesome effort to produce an improved situation for the common man."¹⁰² As for Thomas, he remained in Sindh. In 1951-52, in his official capacity, he was a member of the Pakistan Agricultural Enquiry Committee chaired by the British authority Lord Boyd Orr (first Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization between 1945-48). Even once he had officially stepped down, Thomas

⁹⁷ To reinforce this claim, the governor announced that the Sindh CID chief had been instructed to investigate allegations around the establishment of a parallel *zamindari* "government" in Nawabshah District and the accompanying high handedness of local landowners. *Dawn*, July 25, 1952.

⁹⁸ "The Problem of Land Reform in Pakistan," September 6, 1951, 702.5/9-651 USNA.

⁹⁹ *Dawn*, August 29, 1952.

¹⁰⁰ "Information on Sind Muslim Tribes, and Other Groups," Despatch 765, May 23, 1955, 350.00/5-2355 USNA.

¹⁰¹ Both pamphlets were published by the SHC, Hyderabad. See Junejo et al., "Comrade Hyder Baksh Jatoi's Stitching Role," 86; and Zaffar Junejo, ed., *Peasant Perspectives: an anthology of Comrade Hyder Baksh Jatoi's writings (1950-1969)* (Karachi: Institute of Historical and Social Research, 2023).

¹⁰² "Masud creates another stir this time religious," Despatch 166, May 6, 1957, 790D.00/5-657 USNA.

remained active in pursuit of agrarian “development,” helping shape the findings of the Pakistan Food and Agriculture Commission (1959–60). Alongside this, indulging in his private passion, Thomas also chaired the Pakistan Flower Show for most of the 1950s.

* * *

Agrarian reform in Sindh in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a complicated and contested issue, dividing opinion and failing to reach a consensus or bring about substantive change. Discussions on whether reforms were needed predated the creation of Pakistan and were linked to the knock-on impacts of earlier irrigation schemes and Sindh’s separation from Bombay Presidency in the mid-1930s. Throughout, while *haris* and their representatives may have talked about rights and justice, the authorities remained more concerned with developing the province’s potential in terms of agricultural output and the associated increase in revenues. For this to occur, however, they believed that Sindh’s agriculture had to be “modernized” and, as an integral part of this process of development, agrarian relations had to be restructured (although not transformed). Developing Sindh’s agrarian potential, rather than extending *hari* rights, remained the priority. Despite the planning disruptions of the war years and Partition, much of the “reform” rationale of the immediate pre-independence years crossed the divide from colonial India to independent Pakistan, as epitomized by the 1947–48 Hari Committee of Enquiry. With Sir Roger Thomas at its helm – a consistent advocate of “modern” farming techniques – the committee’s majority findings were hugely influenced by his beliefs around what was in the best interests of agrarian progress, and hence the province.

But debates, and moves, regarding tenancy reform were not restricted to Sindh. Not long after the issue had blown up there, the Pakistan Muslim League established a five-member committee in February 1949, headed by the Punjabi politician Mian Mumtaz Khan Daultana, which was charged with recommending changes to the system of land tenure. In June 1949, only four months later, this “Agrarian Reforms Committee” presented its own lengthy report. Its proposed short-term measures included security of tenure and the abolition of occupancy tenancies, while longer-term measures were touted as potentially involving restrictions on large land ownership and handing over excess land to cultivating tenants, albeit with compensation. The Pakistan Muslim League’s report thus stressed the gradual abolition of landlordism, involving adjustments to the social structure in an “evolutionary” rather than “violent” manner: placing a ceiling on landholdings was viewed as far too drastic a step, and one to be avoided. The report’s recommendation on land holdings – to be implemented later – was 150 acres for irrigated and 450 acres for un-irrigated land, but committee members remained undecided on what should happen with respect to land redistribution.¹⁰³ This initiative represented what, by then, had become a familiar attempt to appease both ordinary Pakistanis and party members from West Pakistan, many of latter possessing varying quantities of land themselves. In line with the short-term measures proposed, provincial-level tenancy acts were introduced in the Punjab and NWFP between 1950 and 1952, although, as in Sindh, these did very little to remedy the problems of actual cultivators.

¹⁰³ “League Committee calls for zamindari abolition,” *Dawn*, July 20, 1949.

Back in Sindh, the issue rumbled on. A convention of Pakistan Muslim League supporters held in Hyderabad in January 1952, for instance, which was attended by more than 300 delegates from Karachi and other parts of Sindh, issued a call for the “total abolition of zamindari by gradual steps” and the introduction of “progressive land reforms.” At the same time, the meeting declared that the Sindh tenancy legislation was detrimental to *hari* interests.¹⁰⁴ All the while, the politics of land ownership continued to be complicated by the presence of large numbers of people displaced by Partition: on one side, there was the problem of how to resettle refugee cultivators, while, on the other, the authorities regarded refugees as an attractive means by which to address the “development” deficit animating the thinking of “experts,” such as Thomas, whose main focus was to increase agrarian efficiency and achieve higher agricultural outputs.

Talk of reform continued sporadically in the following decades. The 1951–52 Pakistan Agricultural Inquiry Committee’s report, for instance, included a note by Sardar Muhammad Ghazanfarullah Khan, which reasoned that just as one would never think of breaking up a textile mill and giving one loom to each worker to increase productivity, so “The same thing should apply in agriculture. Make the life of the tenant as happy as possible but the land should not be parceled out. If this is done, we will rue the day when such laws were enacted.” In a perhaps unintentionally ironic final twist, he concluded:

A great deal depends on the progress we make in the agricultural field and let not the yet unborn generations of Pakistanis say that we let them down. Increasing agricultural wealth is a great adventure on which we are presently embarked and let us not permit the wheels of progress to be clogged by unjust agrarian laws.¹⁰⁵

Pakistan’s First Five-Year Plan of 1955–60 did propose landholding ceilings, but these failed to be realized and land reform – when broached during Ayub Khan’s military regime in 1959 – was arguably more a cosmetic exercise than a genuine attempt to restructure landownership in line with the development rhetoric of the decade that followed, and this despite recognition among the country’s military/bureaucratic elite that “stagnation in agriculture represented a serious obstacle to national development”.¹⁰⁶ It took until the early 1970s, under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s Pakistan Peoples’ Party administration, for some progress to be made, but even then, its reach and significance was extremely limited.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Dawn*, January 27, 1952.

¹⁰⁵ *Report of the Pakistan Agricultural Inquiry Committee, 1951–52* (Karachi: Manager of Publications, 1952), 158.

¹⁰⁶ Government of West Pakistan, *Report of the Land Reforms Commission for West Pakistan* (Lahore: Government of West Pakistan Press, 1959); and Ronald J. Herring and Charles R. Kennedy, “The Political Economy of Farm Mechanization Policy: Tractors in Pakistan,” in *Food, Politics, And Agricultural Development: Case Studies In The Public Policy Of Rural Modernization*, eds. Raymond F. Hopkins et al. (New York: Routledge, 1979), 193–226.

¹⁰⁷ For a concise overview, including the polarization in rural class structure and the increase in landlessness, see Akmal Hussain, “Land reforms in Pakistan: a reconsideration,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 16, no. 1 (1984): 46–52. See also Ronald J. Herring, “Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the ‘Eradication of Feudalism’ in Pakistan,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, no. 4 (1979): 519–557.

At the start of the 21st century, Sindh may have contained among the highest *per capita* incomes in Pakistan, but with around one million *hari* families cultivating land under sharecropping arrangements, human development indicators in the province's rural areas were the worst in the country.¹⁰⁸ Today, technical advances aside, basic inequalities remain at the heart of rural life in this part of Pakistan, just as they did when the 1947–48 Hari Committee of Enquiry's Majority Report placed “development” ahead of “equity” in its list of recommendations for agrarian reform.

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¹⁰⁸ Sindh Structural Adjustment Credit Project, Program Document, World Bank, May 2002, Pakistan - Sindh Structural Adjustment Credit Project (worldbank.org) (accessed March 27, 2024). For more information on 21st-century problems, in particular that of unfree working arrangements, see *Bonded Labor in Agriculture*.