

# LAND GRABBING IN SINDH

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Since independence Sindh Governments policy was to allot all agricultural lands in Sindh to Sindhi farming community. Since Sindh had less population, it was decided to train officer abroad in mechanization of agriculture and evolve new varieties of cotton as cash crops more adoptable to tractor mechanization. Horticulture was another subject. Officer were trained abroad schemes were started and preparation for execution of all such plans were ready. Though Sindh opened tractor operators training school first of its kind in the South Asia in 1953, but it already had agriculture mechanization schemes in operation since 1934 and they were being strengthened continuously. Growers were encouraged to have tractors and allied equipment. At the time of creation of one unit Sindh had the largest investment on tractors in private sector and so had the government. Many Sindh land owners had a dozen tractors or more. Land reforms of 1959/60 halted expansion of mechanization in Sindh for considerable time.

Between 1917 and 1937, the period of economic depression world wide, under low prices of agriculture produce, even the big land owners who were Muslims could not make enough money to support themselves. They had to take loan from Hindu business men and in return mortgaged their lands. As they could not return the loans fully, the courts transferred their lands to the mortgage in spite of payments of high rate of interests over the years. Sindhi Muslim took the plea that as per Manu Sastra the amount interest shall be 5%, it shall not be compounded and it shall not exceed the capital. As interest rate charged was over 5% and was compounded and the mortgage had not only had recovered the loan, but also had made profit from the land transferred to him. The Sindh Assembly along with Hindu members passed a resolution in 1946, to have land returned to owners free of any further payments. As property was a subject of the Central Government of India, it could not be handled before independence in August 1947 and it came before Quaid-e-Azam Mr. M.A. Jinnah Governor General of Pakistan for ascent. No ascent was given but it was decided to allot this land to immigrants from India. Sindh's plea that this land may be allotted to crop sharing tenants (Haris) who cultivated the land for years was ignored. The lands in the possession of Hindus were 40% of total lands in Sindh, in 1947. They all were allotted to immigrants who then started selling them to Sindhi big land owners from the beginning and within 25 years hardly any immigrant owned agriculture land in the whole Sindh. The exercise was fruitless, as immigrant not being familiar with irrigated agriculture, and cropping patterns had neglected it, reduced production per unit of land or unit of water. The result was that production decreased, food shortage was created and to get food Pakistan, had to sign SEATO and CENTO pacts with USA and for next fifty years (with exception of 1981) Pakistan was importing wheat from abroad. It is also known that in tenant cultivation system.

- a) Land owner dictates the crop sharing tenant to grow only certain types of crops likes wheat, rice and cotton suiting low supervision, low inputs,

low incentives among the tenant, low productivity, not making optimum use of soil, water and labor.

- b) Only common low income crops suit land owner tenant system of agriculture.
- c) The tenant has no incentive to improve the land as extra yield he has to be shared with land owner at 50%.
- d) Tenant system leads to poverty of tenant.
- e) Tenant is made to provide free labor to owner for private jobs.

This is history of land allotted to immigrants.

Sindh Government was determined not to sell land to outsiders. At the time of creation of “One Unit” Mr. M.A. Khuhro had put 11 conditions in the agreement, which the Central Government of Pakistan had accepted. Four main conditions were:

- i) The 1945 Sindh Punjab Water Agreement will not be tempered with.
- ii) All barrage lands in Sindh will be allotted to Sindhis.
- iii) Officers posted in Sindh will be from Sindh.
- iv) All Non-Gazetteed posts (Grade 16 and below) will be filled with Sindhis.

When Kotri Barrage was ready, there came General Ayub’s Martial law, which introduced Land Reforms in 1959. In these reforms land limit was so fixed that most of big and medium class land owners had to surrender some land in 1959 and they had no capacity to buy more land.

In 1960, Government of West Pakistan started distributing the land released in Kotri barrage and out of 1.6 million acres at least 75% went to outsiders under various schemes. The best lands i.e., perennial areas of Gaja and Lined Channel went to Defense Forces and others to many outsiders.

Fate of this land was the same as evacuee land of Hindus Most of it was sold to local Sindhi within 15 years. This was how landless Haris and tenants were deprived from allotment of land.

The Hur Movement of 1941-1947 and added to it World War-II problems, had forced the British to evacuate Makhi Dhand a swampy area, wherein Hurs had taken shelter on some isolated islands and had launched terrorist activities. The problem was inherited by the Pakistan Army in 1947. Terrorist activities had stopped before 1947, but Hurs had not yet been resettled on the original land.

Pak Army took advantage Makhi Dhand orests were cleared by MFRO with a large fleet of dozers, at the cost of Army and retired army officials were settled on this land. The program continued from 1947 to mid sixties. This is how Makhi Dhand area was usurped on formation of Pakistan.

The rates fixed for sale of government land in 1932 on opening of Sukkur Barrage were Rs.240 per acre. 28 years later the Martial Law regime fixed rates at Rs.340 per acre for Kotri Barrage lands although the prices had shot up more than 8 times i.e., 4 times during World War-II (1939 – 1945) and at least double this in subsequent years. The price of Guddu lands was fixed at Rs.550 per acre in 1962. At this time transactions of private agriculture land in the Punjab were taking place between rupees 5000 to 10,000 per acre. Thus the low cost fixed was simply a formality to give away the Sindh's lands, virtually free, as only 10% of, this cost was to be paid as initial installment, and the rest was payable in 10 annual installments. All parties got possession of land, on payment of the first installment and with it there came benefit of Taqavi loans adequate to purchase bullocks, implements, seeds, fertilizers and certain labor charges. Taqvi loan exceeded the total cost of the land ultimately payable in 10 years. In many cases annual installments were not paid for many years and Taqvi loans were never returned. This was a peculiar methodology, adopted to give away; Sindh's lands to settlers from out-side.

Under 1977 Martial Law came another proposal to usurp Barani lands of Sindh and allot them mostly to outsiders. 250,000 acres of land in the hilly districts of the Thatta, Mahal Kohistan, Kotri, Sehwan and Johi were allotted to various parties under Scheme "Cattle Farming" in 1982/83. None of the parties invested in Cattle Farming and after 15 years these allotments were cancelled.

Land under riverine forests was also allotted to out side parties in 1982/1984 by General Abbasi.

Nearly one lac (0.1 million) acres of land on both sides of Eastern Nara canal above Jamrao Head was allotted to outsiders between 1962 and 1985.

Scheme for irrigation on Raini canal in the eastern desert of Sukkur district is under implementation and it is again planned to settle outsiders on an area between 50,000 – 96,000 acres, depending on final design and availability of water.

After taking full notice of the above facts we are convinced about the intrigues to deprive the rightful Sindhi heirs of its land by most immoral tactics.