
The Struggle for Suppressed Classes in Sindh: A Case Study of Sindh Hari Committee

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Abstract:

Sindh has been a victim of foreign invasions since time immemorial; foreign invaders badly victimized the local masses through various ways. Sindh possessed a big community of suppressed classes for centuries. In order to emancipate the oppressed masses, enlightened minds emerged time and again in the history. Even in 17th century, about one hundred years before the French revolution, Sufi Shah Inayat Shaheed tried to transform the feudal society into agrarian society with the Slogan "Jo khere So khae" (The cultivator has right on the crop). Sindh Hari Committee, (SHC) was established in 1920 by the leftist elements of Sindh to fight for the rights of haris (peasants). It remained a powerful and strong social class party till 1970s. After the death of Hyder Baksh Jatoe, the party lost its power and strength. This paper evaluates the efforts of SHC for the rights of suppressed class especially the haris, in Sindh.

Keywords: Sindh, feudalism, agrarian, suppressed, socialism, hari, struggle, peasants

INTRODUCTION

Sindh Hari Committee (SHC) remained a leading suppressed class party in Sindh since its emergence in 1920 till 1970s. SHC was politically strong and popular in the politics of Sindh, holding feudal class of Sindh like G. M Sayed, Jamsheed Mehta, and Shaikh Abdul Majeed Sindhi as its members. The party witnessed ups and downs during its politics in 1940s. Under the leadership of Hyder Baksh Jatoe in 1945 party once again reached to its peak in the political arena. that it sustained till the death of Hyder Baksh Jatoe in 1970. The SHC bravely fought against the feudal class of Sindh and even challenged Sindh government for the rights of suppressed class of Sindh. After the emergence of Pakistan in 1947, the party changed its dimension of politics, and emerged as a national political party. It was the first political party from Sindh which openly opposed the One Unit. "Adhi Batai Movement" (half-share or half-division of crop) launched in 1947, and finally the demand of SHC was fulfilled by the Sindh government. The Sindh Tenancy Act was passed in 1950 with the efforts of SHC (The Provincial Assembly of Sindh, 2013). A number of newspapers and magazines were published for the awareness of suppressed class and to pressurize Sindh government in their favour. One of the famous newspapers was *Hari Haqdaar* (peasants deserved). The SHC with its true spirit struggled for the poor and suppressed classes of Sindh.

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FORMATION OF SINDH HARI COMMITTEE: BACKGROUND

Sindh was occupied by the British in 1843. They defeated the Talpur, the then rulers of Sindh. Hosh Muhammad Shedi, the freedom fighter from Sindh, bravely came forward to resist the British power, but failed. War of Miani lasted not more than three hours and finally Sindh fell under the new rulers, the British (Tahir 2010, 52-53). British used the land of Sindh as a source of raw material for its newly established factories in Bombay and other parts of India; even the raw material was exported to their hometown United Kingdom (UK) for textile mills. For that purpose, they put all their efforts and energies to build infrastructure such as irrigation network get more profit from the agricultural land of Sindh. The British changed the whole political, social and economic conditions of Sindh not for the common people but for their own economic purpose (Tahir 2010, 54). After hundred years of occupation of the Bengal, the British forces occupied Sindh and Punjab in 1843 and 1849, respectively. Initially, the British -had a policy of weakening the feudal system in this area; soon they realized that it was better to support the feudal class instead of weakening them. Amicable political relations were made with the feudal lords. The British conferred new land to the feudal lords and also right of ownerships (Ullah 2015, 106-11). In order to maintain their control, the British founded the feudal system in whole India including Sindh. Feudal system prevailed in Sindh before the British but the first right on the land was of haris who irrigated the land, in return haris gave little number of crops to the lords and used to help in any military purpose (Jatoo 2012, 55).

The conditions of haris and its fellow rural classes were not much satisfactory throughout history of Sindh due to strong *wadera* and *jageerdari* system (both referred to as feudalism) in Sindh. The menace has been continued for centuries. The *waderas* had private jails where peasants were kept. The private jails for peasants were very common in Sindh, where even government could not intervene. The poor hungry haris worked on fields whole day under miserable conditions, while their women were exposed to sexual violence in those private jails (Ahmad 2008, 63).

The British changed and systematized the income system as well as land tenure in Sindh. Under new system, revenue was being paid in cash form at utmost of one third (1/3rd) of total produce. On certain extent, income or revenue rates were revised but the method of collection was almost intact as it was in Talpurs regime. The new *jageerdars* were conferred upon about 2000 acres' land on making alliance with the British imperialists. Before the conquest of Sindh by the British there were more than 19 lakh *bighas* of land under the control of Sindhi *waderas*. When the British conquered Sindh, they allocated 2,93,000 acres to 1st class feudal, 4,79,000 to Talpur feudal, 56,000 to 55 *waderas*, fifteen grants in *khairaats* 2,20,000 acres was distributed in fifteen thousand people from suppressed classes, 17,200 acres to Rajpoots, 54,500 acres to different Baloch tribes of Sindh (Sorely 1968, 184). In this way powerful feudal system came into being in Sindh by the advent of the British. Unfortunately, nothing was given to poor haris and poor masses of Sindh. In the British Raj, the poor haris were extremely exploited not only in the hands of the British but also through the local loyal Sindhi *waderas*.

The British legalized the feudalism in Sindh. Numerous laws and regulations were passed to safeguard the power of *waderas* while unfortunately no step had been taken for the rights of haris. Thus, haris were under the direct sway of their *waderas*. Their (haris) relations merely relied on the

wish and will of *wadera* (Tahir 2010, 92). To cultivate more lands in Sindh, the British adopted the policy to make barrages and canals in Sindh. In 1932, work on Sukkur Barrage was completed and almost more than 3.25 million acres' of land in Sindh was brought under cultivation. These lands were also sold to *waderas*, in the years 1942-43; more than 1.5 million acres of the newly irrigated lands in Sindh were sold to the *waderas* for small amount. Small owners and landless haris were totally unable to purchase the lands, so the lands were mostly sold to the *waderas* of Sindh and new settlers of Punjab under the *harap grants*. Sindhi local haris got limited land which was reserved through *hari grants*. The haris from outside of the Sindh province were settled in order to control the local haris. Under these circumstances, local masses of Sindh motivated the enlightened minds of Sindh to launch a movement for the rights of haris and other suppressed classes of Sindh which led to the making of SHC in 1920. The founding figures of the SHC were Jamsheed Mehta, G. N. Gokhale, (Sangi, 2017) and G. M. Syed, Shaikh Abdul Majeed Sindhi, Jethmal Parasam and Comrade Abdul Qader. All of them belonged to feudal class. Initially, SHC took the steps to bring pro-peasant policy and laws. *Harrap grant batai system* and grant of permanent tenure for haris remained the main objective of SHC (Muhammad, 1978, 35).

Sindh Hari Committee, Batai Tehreek and Elati Tehreek

With the passage of time, SHC as a party of oppressed classes became strong politically. Its branches were established at *tehsil* and districts levels throughout Sindh. Its activists and leaders doubled due to its big popularity as a party of oppressed classes of Sindh. Various leaders were ready to fight for the rights of peasants. Leaders of the SHC belonged to various classes, religions and ethnic groups of the society (Muhammad 2008, 54).

Being popular, SHC decided to contest the elections in order to enter into electoral politics. Its leaders with the ideology of SHC contested the elections either independently or on the ticket of other political parties. Soon it got much popularity than other political parties like All India Muslim League (AIML) and the All India National Congress (AINC). They also participated in the 1946 elections in British India. Hyder Baksh Jatoe, Maulana Aziz Jarwar and other leaders of SHC contested the 1946 elections. Due to feudal system and presence of AIML in Sindh, they did not win any seat in the province. But it was the popularity of SHC that AIML did not win the mandatory majority to make the government, so new elections were announced by the government. Now they adopted a new way to enter into the electoral politics, in spite of contesting elections independently or on the platform of SHC, they realized to break the strength of feudal membership of AIML by joining it (Muhammad 2008, 25-26). That shortcut policy of SHC and its members proved fruitful for short span of time but politically grave for the long term. The partition of India in 1947 snatched the most dynamic and determinant leaders of SHC when Hindus and Sikhs migrated to India. Newly independent state of Pakistan could not prove beneficial for suppressed classes of Sindh, even the free movement of SHC was jeopardized in new state (Muhammad 2008, 60).

The vanguards of SHC were well known political and social workers of Sindh. The name of Hyder Baksh Jatoe is prominent among all of them; he was a member of Communist Party of India (CPI) and AINC. During the British period he was a government collector but soon he left the government service and joined SHC to serve the poor and deprived classes of Sindh. So, he became the president of SHC in 1945. SHC during its initial years of struggle put the slogan against Tenancy Act given by

Sir Rogar Thomas. The act was against the rights of haris and SHC took the issue very sincerely to demolish it. SHC was a democratic party in all its activities in and outside the party. SHC was very much organized, and it had many branches in various districts and *talukas* of Sindh. It was also fully determined against the British imperialism.

SHC used to organize conferences where issues related to poor masses and haris were brought under discussion. The big achievement of SHC was the Sindh Tenancy Act (Ahmad 2008, 12). SHC played a vital role in struggle for the rights of landless haris, and remained active by putting forward the demands related to the rights of poor and deprived masses of Sindh. From forced labour to the exile of land, from feudalism to unjust attitude of government, their sufferings were countless and deep rooted in pages of history of United India. Feudal system had been abolished from almost all over the world, for goodwill and social uplifting of poor class of society. But in Pakistan the feudal system still prevails.

The initial programme of SHC was to force the government for the share of lands as *harap grants* to peasants (landless) in the Lloyd Barrage (Visvesvaraya & Bahadur 1929, 47-50) area and settlement of *batai system* (division of produce) and giving everlasting possession to landless haris (Visvesvaraya & Bahadur 1929, 35). Initially, the committee did not work for the abolition of feudal system in Sindh which was a big menace for the lives of haris. because almost all the founding members belonged to feudal class including G.M. Syed and Shaikh Abdul Majeed Sindhi. They were not interested to destroy the feudal system in Sindh. When the Sukkur Barrage was completed in 1932, the two members of SHC, Qader Baksh Nizamani and Noor Muhammad Palejo, extremely opposed the landlords who were receiving share in newly irrigated lands, Consequently, G.M Sayed and his supporters left the committee (Bhutto 1989, 14).

In its beginning, SHC focused on the evictions of *mukadim* from landlords. Such activity of SHC greatly attracted the *mukadims* and small owners of land in Sindh. In early phase of its struggle (1935-36). SHC ultimately succeeded to achieve the hereditary rights of *mukadims* on Jagirs (Government of Sindh 1949, 27). SHC began its movement from Hyderabad and soon it was spreaded to other major cities of Sindh. Most of the landless haris, lower class of the society and small *Zemindar* joined the movement (Tahir 2010, 95). The Muslim big landlords were united against any such movement in Sindh. In 1943, the matter of revision of land assessment was brought into Sindh Assembly under Sir Hidayatullah ministry (AIML). The feudal members strongly opposed the proposal of government. One of the Talpur Zemindar members asked for the adjournment of the proposal. The work was carried on: 12 members were against out of 24. The feudal members of the Sindh Assembly in 1943 were pressurizing the government to cancel the *Jagirdari Act*. That act was passed by Allah Baksh Ministry. Ultimately government decided to amend the act soon by appointing an investigation committee. The feudal members of the Assembly also passed resolution for re-installing the inhuman system of Honorary Bench Magistrates. It was a big game played by the *waderas* to keep influence on haris (Jatoo 1951, 62).

In 1943, SHC arranged a big rally in Hyderabad Sindh demanding betterment in *batai system* and grant of permanent tenure to landless haris. Its efforts obtained motion by the ratifying of Bombay Tenancy Act in 1940. Sindh government also decided to prepare such Act. For that purpose, the task was given to the collectors to investigate. In 1942, a committee was made to prepare its drafts

specially based on Bombay Tenancy Act. It was opposed by Muhammad Ayub Khuhro on the pretext that there were no such conditions in Sindh as it was in Bombay (Government of Sindh 1945, 9). It was the beginning of SHC that the most important social activist of Sindh Qazi Faiz Muhammad became the part of hari struggle. He proved to be the most dynamic and leading figure of SHC by launching movement against *Elati Tehreek* and *batai system*. He was the most influential leading figure in central Sindh. He got sympathy from M. Masood (collector) and Tom Kinston's of Sanghar, both were well-wisher of *hari tehreek*. Hyder Baksh Jatoe and other leaders were also the part of the movement. They all put pressure over the waderas to give half of the share to the peasants and peasants were also encouraged to stand for their rights. That Batai movement was a complete success in Nawabshah and Sanghar districts while less influential in other areas, because Tom Kinston and M. Masood left those districts. It was clear that role of bureaucracy and government side was much helpful for such movements.

Government officers' role cannot be ignored while Hyder Baksh Jatoe, M. Masood, and Tom Kinston were the best examples (Hussain & Muhyddin, 2014, 30-31). Finally, Sindh government passed Sindh Tenancy Act in 1950. *Batai System* was also improved by the government and haris got half of the crops on irrigation of the lands (Jatoe 2012, 15).

SHC played a negligible role in making of Pakistan, and so All Pakistan Muslim League (APML) became the feudal party having no interest to bring any pro-peasant constitutional reforms. Even the other strong political parties were on the same line. According to Khadorposh, Fall of Dhaka and making of independent Bangladesh was due to social structure of West Pakistan. Bengalis felt uncomfortable in feudal system. West Pakistan was not interested to bring an end to feudal system while the East Pakistan intended to abolish it (Khadarposh 2002, 32-33). After partition, India abolished the feudal system and introduced land reforms by giving rights to their peasants. But Pakistani government did not take any step regarding peasants' rights and introducing land reforms (Khadarposh 2002, 68-71).

SHC could not succeed to re-allot more than 40 percent of the lands in Sindh, that had been uninhabited by the Hindus who left Sindh after partition. Qazi Faiz Muhammad struggled a lot being the member of Muslim League Sindh. Hyder Baksh Jatoe also could not succeed. Qazi Faiz Muhammad being the member of APML pressurized the Chief Minister Khuhro for the re-allotment of the land to local landless haris, but the feudals were too smarter than hari activists. Fake haris were given the lands instead of true ones, and later those lands were registered in their names. In those circumstances, Qazi Faiz Muhammad had begun '*Elati Tehreek* and raised slogans '*Hari Haqdaar*' (peasant, the deserved ones), but he was suppressed by his fellow members (Muhammad 2008, 38-39).

The One-unit scheme and imposition of martial law by Ayub Khan proved fatal for Sindh and Sindhi haris. It caused the failure of *Elati tehreek* and declined the peasant's movement in Sindh. Sindhi people responded to their leaders specially Hyder Baksh Jatoe and Qazi Faiz Muhammad. The lands given to the regular peasants were snatched and allotted to the new migrated peasants from India and Punjab. For this purpose, police force was used to forcibly evacuate lands by burning and threatening the permanent peasants. Even the peasant leaders and activists including Comrade Hyder Baksh Jatoe, Qazi Faiz Muhammad, and many others were detained and imprisoned during

that political strife of Ayub era (1958-69), but they did not surrender from hari movements anyway. The Vanguard of the *Elati Tehreek*, Qazi Faiz Muhammad was most active leader who launched disobedience movements against One Unit. During the movement, 111 peasants were arrested. Qazi Faiz thought to halt the movement in order to prevent the arrest of peasants and save them from any big fine. He was afraid that the peasants would sell their property in order to pay for heavy fines. On his request to the local authorities of the Mehrabapur, peasants were released (Hussain & Muhyddin 2014, 31-32). No doubt such big movements against a dictator politically awakened the masses in Sindh. It was as big a movement as the one was launched by Shah Inayat Shaheed in the 17th century.

Struggle for Constitutional Guaranties to Peasants

The leaders and activists of hari committee including Hyder Baksh Jatoe and Qazi Faiz Muhammad thought to struggle for the constitutional guaranties for the peasants, and launched a big movement. Both *Elati* and *Batai* movements did not fully succeed but compelled the government to pass Sindh Tenancy Act in 1950, later an amendment in 1952 fully abandoned *Abwabs* and half of the share was constitutionally guaranteed. *Abwab* was the extra deduction of crop share from the part of haris. *Abwab* was deducted by lords on the pretext for the welfare of village. These movements later brought the land reforms in Ayub and Bhutto eras respectively but could not change the fortune of the peasants (Sangat 2012, 31). These land reforms of the powerful governments were not implemented as expected. In all land reforms introduced in the 40s, 60s and 70s feudal lords benefited by purchasing or leasing the lands on the name of sharecroppers. So, the landlords benefited more than real sharecroppers. After the payment of all the installments by landlords, they used to purchase these lands legally from sharecroppers. Land reforms could not succeed due to many reasons; land ceiling was high and even that was set for a family member, not for the entire family, that helped the feudal lords to keep the land integrated. Landlords being politically dominant; obviously set all the terms and conditions and devised policies of land reforms as they wished instead of keeping in view the peasants' conditions and interest. In that way they brought feudal-friendly reforms, at the cost of peasants' interests. During the entire process, landless migrated haris and landless local haris were completely ignored (Sangat,2012). Instead lands were sold to Punjabi and migrated landlords (Shah, 2007). Local peasants, especially landless peasants were not considered as stakeholders in their own areas. They were ignored through all the land reforms (Sangat, 2012). Failure of the various military and civilian governments to solve the legal issues of haris, landless peasants, local deprived classes and poor masses made them realize that they had been badly exploited and deprived of their due legal rights.

Awami Tehreek

Fazul Rahu, who strongly believed in Maoist ideology emerged as peasants' leader in Bhutto (and Zial) era. He sought to bring such a big movement for the rights of peasants in Sindh and Pakistan. He launched Awami Tehreek (people's movement) and used sickle as symbol with the slogan of '*Jea Hari*' (Live long peasant). At the same time, he earned support and sympathy from local national political parties and leaders. Awami Tehreek of Fazul Rahu also was merged in the National Awami Party, a big alliance of leftists in Pakistan. He belonged to lower class of Sindh and became a leading figure during the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) against Zia ul Haq. It was due

to his efforts that Bhutto brought land reforms in Pakistan. Soon he emerged as a charismatic social and political leader. However, in a short span of time, his party lost its momentum as it indulged in Sindhi-ethno politics. Thus, it could not fully concentrate on core agenda of peasants. After his assassination, Rasool Baksh Palejo became the vanguard of Awami Tehreek. Palejo renamed the party as Sindhi Awami Tehreek (Sindhi People's Movement) and widened its ideological base as a nationalist-socialist party. Palejo's politics also revolved around a struggle against military rule, and for restoration of democracy and social reforms at national level. He was imprisoned for almost 11 years. However, his efforts and reforms in party could not solve the issues of peasants and poor masses in Sindh due to many internal and external factors.

SHC was once again reorganized in 1977 with the support of Communist party and Sindhi nationalist parties, but for a short span. Later, after few years the party could not maintain itself and was confined only to the papers and did not remain as much active and functional as it was for the last few decades because many other political parties in Sindh had opened peasants' wings. One of the Sindhi leftist and Marxist Naz Sani says about the final impotency of SHC, hence: "SHC made the people aware about their due rights but unluckily could not fully succeed on large scale as it should have been. It had been the victim of big *waderas* of Sindh. Now it became the part of history which can only be read in the pages of history" (Sanai 1984, 6-15, & 13).

CONCLUSION

For few decades, Peasants' activists and leaders in Sindh used different methods to fight for the rights of haris; it all was long-term and hard struggle that they made during civilian and non-civilian governments. They took various issues of haris during their struggle; be it *batai system*, *tenant's allotment*, *wedera* dominancy or any other issue related to the sorrows and issues of deprived classes of Sindh. Movements for the poor were begun vehemently from the age of Shah Inayat Shaheed of Jok till the death of Fazul Raho. Later, the struggle did not progress vehemently like before. Land is the source upon which poor tenants and other classes of society depend, so the land remained the main issue of Sindh and the main issue of leftists' minds of Sindh. *Wadera* system in Sindh has created multiple issues for all the classes of society by their dominancy on lands. Every government supported and cooperated the *waderas* for their self-interest. Land reforms were the main target of all the movements in order to create economic balance in the society, but problems of all segments of the society were not laying only in land reforms, there also existed many other pressing issues, such as abolitions of imperialism, communal autonomy, tribal fighting, education for all etc.

After the big movement of Shah Inayat Shaheed it was the movement launched by SHC in the last two decades of British period and later in Pakistan. SHC was progressive movement that contributed a lot for the struggle of suppressed class of Sindh and partially succeeded in its objectives. SHC produced dedicated leaders, activists and progressive movements in Sindh; MRD is one of the best examples. It was bad luck for SHC that it had changed its objectives after the creation of Pakistan; soon it became national and political party and slowly went away from the main politics of social class. Yet till the death of Hyder Baksh Jatoe in 1970 it was active, but after his death it suddenly became politically paralyzed.

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