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THE IMPACT OF THE AGRARIAN STRUCTURE ON THE
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF UNDIVIDED PAKISTAN

by

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All views, interpretations, recommendations, and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the supporting or cooperating agencies.

1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the subject of the study. It discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It also provides a brief overview of the methodology used in the study.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed description of the methodology used in the study. It discusses the data sources, the data collection methods, and the data analysis methods.

3. The third part of the report is a discussion of the results of the study. It discusses the findings of the study and the implications of the findings for the field of study.

4. The fourth part of the report is a conclusion and a list of references. The conclusion summarizes the findings of the study and the implications of the findings. The list of references provides a list of the sources used in the study.

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Introduction

A variety of factors provide the back-drop for the emergence of the eastern part of Pakistan¹ as the independent state of Bangla Desh. They include: the ever-widening economic disparity between the two parts of Pakistan; suspension of parliamentary democracy there since 1958; serious under-representation of East Pakistan in the bureaucracy, armed forces, business, and industry; the gradual decline in the influence of religion as a common denominator between the two regions; geographical discontinuity; differences in language and culture; and the incapability of the political leadership of West Pakistan to establish meaningful rapport with its counter-part in the eastern wing. Hence, several explanations may be offered of the cumulative and mutually reinforcing reaction to these factors in the eastern region which proved adverse to the continuity of the partnership with West Pakistan.²

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1. Pakistan in this paper, unless otherwise indicated, refers to the undivided Pakistan of pre-1971 and so includes the eastern part, now the Peoples' Republic of Bangla Desh.

2. Recent accounts and explanations include: David Loshak, Pakistan Crisis (Heinemann, London, 1971); Kabir Uddin Ahmad, Breakup of Pakistan, Background and Prospects of Bangladesh (The Social Science Publishers, London, 1972); Kalim Siddiqi, Conflict, Crisis and War in Pakistan (Macmillan, London, 1972).

The purpose of this paper is to advance the hypothesis that the land tenure structure of an under-developed country with a predominantly agricultural economy has an important bearing on political leadership and, therefore, on the decision-making authority in the country's Government. We test this hypothesis by examining the developments in Pakistan.

By land tenure structure we mean the rights and relationships among men, which govern the conditions for the use and disposition of the land they own or cultivate. This includes, inter alia, the distribution of land ownership by sizes; cultivation, rental, and other arrangements for the allocation of costs and distribution of produce; and the nature of security of tenure offered to cultivators. Land tenure relationships are of crucial importance in the early stages of economic and social development as land is the strategic resource, ownership of which governs access to other resources and, hence confers political power, social prestige, and economic opportunities. Since the evolution of land tenure structures was different in the two parts of Pakistan, we are able to observe how these differences affected the political leadership and aspirations of East and West Pakistan.

The two regions of Pakistan had different agro-climatic conditions. East Pakistan has an abundance of rainfall but suffers from alternating droughts and floods, and, in some coastal areas, soil salinity. Her principal crops are rice, tea, jute, and sugar cane. West Pakistan is characterized by an arid climate requiring extensive irrigation facilities for cultivation. Her main crops are wheat, cotton, and sugar cane.

The regions differed widely in their size, climate, soil condition, population densities relative to cultivated land, and the historical forces bearing on land tenure. These differences had so conditioned the nature of

the political leadership and the program for each wing as to become the basis of their irreconcilability. There was little scope for attempts towards adjustment between them or the formulation of a national policy without loss of popularity amongst the largely illiterate electorate of each region.

The Evolution of Agrarian Structure

First, we trace briefly the historical evolution of the land tenure structures of the two wings of erstwhile Pakistan. Peasant ownership of land was the original position in both parts of the country.³ Either because it was never in question or because the economic significance of land ownership had not fully emerged, the question of ownership as such did not feature in any of the reforms prior to 1765 in the Bengal Presidency (of which East Pakistan was a part), or until 1840 in the western part of Pakistan. Land tenure reform in the pre-British period was concerned only with survey and settlement, and the assessment and collection of land revenues.

These reforms and their consequent impact quite frequently did not outlast the reformer. Reaction followed. In fact, considerable chaos prevailed towards the end of the Mogul period (1765 - 1840). Taking advantage of the weakness of the central power at Delhi, several adventurers built up their own spheres of influence and introduced their own systems, most of which adversely affected the cultivators' proprietorship of land.

3. M.A. Zaman, "The Relevance of Land Reform to Economic Progress in Pakistan" (Thesis, Manchester University, 1968).

Tenure Reforms in East Pakistan: The culmination of this process in East Pakistan came in 1793, when, after a period of trial, the British-owned East India Company, under Lord Cornwallis, imposed landlordism of the Irish model in East Pakistan and thereby reduced the owner tillers to tenant status. The aim was to maximize land revenue and stabilize its collection by recognizing ⁴ the highest bidders amongst the revenue collectors, speculators, merchant-capitalists, and landlords with the right of inheritance and transfer and settling with them specified areas of land in return for a perpetually fixed land revenue payable in cash. The amount was fixed at 10/11ths of the rents realized by the landlords at that time.

4. In this exercise of recognition the Company deliberately sowed the seed of its infamous "divide and rule" policy. It usurped power from the reigning Muslim community through a process of intrigue, subversion, and false promise. To consolidate its position and to ensure that the Muslims would not constitute any threat to its continuity as an imperial power, it adopted the shrewd policy of systematically discriminating against them. The bulk of those who were recognized as landlords came, therefore, from the Hindu community, although the majority of the population is Muslim in Bengal, a situation which continued right up to the end of British rule in 1947. The ownership of land provided the Hindu community with the most coveted and traditional source of affluence: English education, prestige, and political power. It thus gained a stranglehold over the Muslims, who were reduced to the status of mere tenants, with all the attendant disabilities. The disparity between the two communities gradually widened in every sphere of life and further aggravated the differences between them, especially those of religion, and embittered their relationship. It thus complicated the subsequent task of tenure reform and kept them divided on communal lines, even against British rule. The developments that followed the permanent settlement of 1793 partly explain the most consistent support of the "two nations theory," coming as it did from the Muslims of Bengal as early as 1906 and the decisive electoral mandate in favor of it in 1945. If the British had not adopted the "divide and rule" policy in 1793 the course of political history in British-held India might have been different and the partition of India on communal grounds unnecessary in 1947. However, this can legitimately be the subject of another paper.

Since there was no control on rents between 1793 and 1859, the landlords raised their rents and derived an increasing surplus. Besides, with the worsening of the man-land ratio and lack of alternative employment outside agriculture in East Pakistan, the growing difference between the revenue payable to the government and rent actually collected left ample scope for subinfeudation. That is, landlords leased out their estates in perpetuity in consideration of a payment higher than their revenue liability. The evil effect of this practice was aggravated by the subdivision of estates due to the operation of the law of inheritance. Thus revenue from within the farm became the order of the day, "each resembling a screw upon screw, the last coming down on the tenants with the pressure of them all."⁵ As the Simon Commission pointed out in 1930, in some cases there were as many as 50 intermediary rent-receiving interests between the landlord and the actual tenant-cultivator.

In a given situation in which the institution of landlordism is assumed to be unalterable,⁶ the usual course is to ensure the security of the tenants and regulate the rent payable by them by means of legislative provisions. The security of tenants was sought through a legal fiction termed "occupancy rights" and equity in rents attempted by rent controls. Possibly because the need, and, therefore, the demand for reform was greater in the eastern part, tenancy reform was introduced first there and only later in the western part. In East Pakistan, the Rent Act of 1859, the

5. B.H. Baden Powell, Land System of British India (Clarendon Press Oxford, 1892), vol. I, p. 407.

6. The Royal Commission on Agriculture (1928) was precluded by its terms of reference from discussing the Zamindari (landlordism) system itself.

Great Rent Case of 1865, the Tenancy Act of 1885, Act V of 1928, and Act VI of 1938, taken together, give specified classes of tenants some security of tenancy and assurance of less inequitable rent.⁷

The most important tenure reform took place in East Pakistan soon after independence. The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 abolished, with compensation, all landlords' estates and intermediary rent-receiving interests between the state and the actual cultivators (Zamindari). The abolition was facilitated by the migration of most of the influential and wealthy (Hindu) landlords to India consequent on the division of British India on communal lines in 1947. All cultivators--former tenants and owners--became tenants of the state and paid land revenue to the government. They were given permanent and heritable rights but could not sublet the land or subdivide and fragment their holdings. However, sharecroppers, who amounted to about 15 percent of cultivators, were omitted from the provisions of this legislation and the 1859 definition of "cultivator" was retained to enable non-agriculturists to continue to own land.⁸ The ceiling on land holdings was placed at about

7. Of all these Acts, that of 1885 is the most comprehensive in provisions covering all interests in land in Bangla Desh, which was a part of undivided Bengal during the British Rule (1793-1947).

8. This flexibility of the definition of "cultivator" has limited considerably the regulative effect of the tenancy acts since 1859. If there had been no interests of indigo planters to be safeguarded, an actual non-cultivator would not have been a "cultivator" in law. It is remarkable how badly subsequent efforts to give relief to tenants get frustrated if a loophole is allowed to remain at the beginning of a tenancy reform. Once a concession is made, which is inconsistent with the main objectives, it is extremely difficult to withdraw it later. The immediate reason for the concession may no longer pertain, but a new vested interest develops around the concession. If it becomes powerful, as it did in India and Pakistan, then it can ensure that no reform adverse to its own interest will be enacted. This is evident even from the post-independence tenure reform in Pakistan. In neither country could the word "cultivator" be rigorously defined to correct the original mistake. Thus, if in 1859 the concession to the indigo planters had not been made, it is reasonable to assume that the regulative effect of the tenancy acts between 1859 and 1950 would have been substantial.

33 acres per family, or 3.3 acres per family member, whichever was greater. A further 3.3 acres were permitted for a homestead. Land in excess of this was to be purchased by the state and redistributed among the landless and small cultivators. These developments in land tenure have had significant repercussions: East Pakistan emerged as a country with essentially a small-holding agriculture. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Percentage of Farms and Area Classified by Size, East Pakistan, 1960.

Size of Farm in Acres	Percent of Farms	Percent of Area
Under 0.5	13	1
0.5 to under 1.0	11	2
1.0 to under 2.5	27	13
2.5 to under 5.0	26	26
5.0 to under 7.5	12	19
7.5 to under 12.5	7	19
12.5 to under 25.0	3	14
25.0 to under 40.0	-	3
40.0 and over	-	2
Total East Pakistan	100 ^a	100 ^a

^a Columns do not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Census of Agriculture 1960, Part I - East Pakistan, Table 3

In 1950 it was politically popular to abolish Zamindary and fix the upper limit on land-holding at 3.3 acres per member of a family. In 1961, however, following the example of West Pakistan, East Pakistan raised the land-holding ceiling to 125 acres per family, including orchards. It is extremely improbable that this could have happened if the parliamentary form of government, with direct adult franchise, had not been discontinued

by the military regime in 1958. In 1972 the ceiling was again revised downward to the 1950 level. If East Pakistan had continued to be a part of an undivided Pakistan, the last revision could not have been made.

As Table 1 reveals, in 1960 East Pakistan was a land without a substantial number of big landlords influential and resourceful enough to dictate to the government. As a result there was no dominating landlord class to control and influence political developments. In other words, the series of land reforms destroyed feudalism.

Though feudalism had been destroyed by the reforms, at the same time the country was denied a class of rich entrepreneurs who could build up its industry. The egalitarianism of East Pakistan was one of poverty. The Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture estimated that half the holdings in 1928 were barely sufficient for maintenance. The Bengal Land Revenue Commission of 1940, after commenting on the smallness of the land holdings, went on to state "it is virtually impossible to suggest any remedy."

This does not imply that there are no wealthy people at all, but such individually wealthy people cannot be identified as a class. The big land-holdings (mostly tea estates) are foreign-owned and hence do not exert political influence. The educated elite and dominant middle class in Bangla Desh generally neither have familial ties with vested landlord interests nor can be identified with a capitalist class. The difficult experience with the pre-1950 landlords, the absence of both

an identifiable upper class and left-wing political movements dating back to the 1930s, appalling poverty, and the growing disenchantment of the rural electorate of East Pakistan with the landed aristocracy which was the power base of the political parties of West Pakistan and of the central government in Karachi/Islamabad, brought East Pakistan's middle class closer to the peasantry. A sense of oneness developed between them, and the political preference of Bangla Desh has therefore been for democratic socialism.

Evolution of Agrarian Structures in West Pakistan: The evolution of agrarian structures in West Pakistan was quite different from those of East Pakistan. In West Pakistan former revenue officials, beneficiaries, and some owner-cultivators were recognized as proprietors by the British rulers around the 1840s. Their revenue liability from the land was not fixed in perpetuity, but was periodically reassessed, thereby restricting the scope of subinfeudation on the Bangla Desh pattern and serving as a brake on the fragmentation of holdings. This is reflected in the comparatively larger size of ownership of holdings in West Pakistan, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Land Ownership Pattern in West Pakistan, 1959

Size of holdings in acres	No of owners	Percentage of total owners	Area owned	Percentage of the total area
0 - 5	3,266,137	64.2	7,425,614	15.00
5 - 25	1,452,421	29.0	15,438,138	33.60
25 - 100	286,470	5.6	10,616,308	21.00
100 - 500	57,287	1.1	7,671,537	15.40
500 and over	<u>6,061</u>	<u>0.1</u>	<u>7,490,933</u>	<u>15.00</u>
	<u>5,068,376</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>48,642,530</u>	100.00

Source: Report of the Land Reforms Commission, 1959

It will be seen from Table 2 that those landlords holding over 500 acres numbered 6,061 persons, representing only 0.1 per cent of landowners; and they owned about 7.5 million acres, or 15 per cent of the total land area. Each person in this group owned, on average, 1,236 acres, compared to an overall national ownership average of 9.5 acres. The contrast in the size of operational holdings between East and West Pakistan is evident from the data in Table 3.

Table 3

Percentage of Farms and Area Classified by Size, East and West Pakistan,

1960

Size of Farm in Acres	Percent of Farms		Percent of Total Farm Area	
	East	West	East	West
Less than 5 acres	78	49	43	10
5 to under 12.5	19	28	38	22
12.5 to under 25	2.5	15	14	26
25 and above	0.5	8	5	42
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Census of Agriculture 1960, Parts 1 & 2

It will be appreciated that tenure reform is "first and foremost a political decision." This is very well borne out by the course of tenure reform in West Pakistan, where very limited progress in this field was made during the British rule. In fact, Sind in West Pakistan did not have any tenancy act until 1950; it did not even have an inquiry committee until 1945, and the report of that committee was shelved. Another Committee was appointed in 1947-48, with a landlord as its chairman. It would not, therefore, discuss land ownership at all. However, ultimately some tenancy reform was suggested.

Since the landlords and tenants generally came from the same Muslim community, political development on a communal basis after 1935

did not benefit the tenants in any way. In contrast to East Pakistan, where with the growing popularity of the Muslim League as the most representative Muslim political organization in pre-1947 days, a Hindu landlord had to consider the possible repercussions of his conduct towards his overwhelmingly Muslim tenants, in West Pakistan a landlord had no need for such prudence.

Moreover, leadership of the party in power fell into the hands of landlords and continued there until 1959. All the Chief Ministers of Punjab, Sind, and NWFP of Pakistan were themselves big landlords from 1947 onwards. They could hardly, therefore, be enthusiastic about a reform which would alter the primary base of their power and affluence. The result was an apology for it - the Act of 1950.

It is interesting to note the contrast in East Pakistan. The leadership of the ruling party there was middle class from 1948 on. Indeed, her Chief Minister, a self-made lawyer, referred to himself as a "proletarian Prime Minister."⁹ The Government, therefore, far from shelving the Bengla Land Revenue Commission Report of 1940, dug it up and by 1950 passed the State Acquisition Act.

Any major tenure reform in West Pakistan, on the other hand, was unthinkable between 1947 and 1959. The landlord class there has traditionally played an important role in politics. Sayeed estimated

9. Government of East Bengal, Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, 1949 - 50, vol.IV, no. 6, p. 159.

that of the 503 members of the Muslim League Parliamentary party in 1942, as many as 163 were landlords.¹⁰ This no doubt includes only well-known landlords. The interests of lawyers and other professionals and of other non-landlord groups were often aligned with those of the landlords.

Myrdal emphasizes this point eloquently:

The class background of the leadership that came to power on the achievement of statehood explains much of its political conservatism. They were mainly professional politicians, related to the Muslim hereditary landlords of the northern part of imperial India, with only a sprinkling of the type of industrialists and commercial people....¹¹

Bredo makes the point even more strongly:

the feudal-minded class of large landlords ... has been a class conspicuous for extravagant consumption expenditures, pernicious political influence, and narrowness of point of view. As a class they have dominated the political life of the province and exerted a corrupting influence ... There is good reason to believe that the landlord class has been responsible for much of the instability in government.¹²

It was owing to this landlord class domination that the beginning of a tenure reform in West Pakistan had to await martial law

10. Khalid B. Sayeed, The Political System of Pakistan (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston), p. 55.

11. Gunnar Myrdal, Asian Drama: An Inquiry Into the Poverty of Nations (Pantheon, New York, 1968), vol. 1, p. 309.

12. William Bredo, "Land Reform and Development in Pakistan" in Land Tenure Industrialization and Social Stability, ed. Walter Froelich (The Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 1961), p. 270.

in 1958. In 1959, the Ayub Khan government placed the ceiling on land ownership at 500 irrigated or 1,000 unirrigated acres of individual holdings, with several exemptions.¹³ It was not possible for the Government to be any more radical in fixing the ceiling. Two factors understandably influenced its decision. First, the wealthy landlords, influential ex-politicians, and ministers were opposed to any tenure reform at all. They were not entirely without influence during the martial law period, managing to dilute the reform proposals.

Second, and more important, is the explanation offered by Sayeed.¹⁴ According to him, the officers of Pakistan's armed forces, in contrast to those of Egypt, usually come from the "old wealthy land-owning families." Similarly, Siddiqui states that "the bulk of the army's officers came from middle-sized landlord families and radical land reforms were likely to lose the President their support."¹⁵ Some of the prominent leaders of the military coup d'etat also had large landholdings. The Ayub Khan government could not, therefore, "afford to alienate"

13. The exemptions include the right to own orchards up to an additional 150 acres if in blocks of not less than 10 acres each; stud and livestock farming areas; retention above the limits specified if they are less than 36,000 produce index units; right to transfer to heirs up to 18,000 produce index units, etc. (these are calculated on the basis of the produce value of the average matured yield of each class of soil at stipulated prices).

14. K. B. Sayeed, "Martial Law Administration in Pakistan" Far Eastern Survey, no. 5 (May 1959), pp. 73-78.

15. K. Siddiqui, Conflict, Crisis and War in Pakistan, pp. 102-3.

its "own army officers" on whose continued support its existence depended. This meant the tenure reform had to be weak enough in content, and a sad contrast to what had been done in Bangla Desh, not to be unacceptable to too many Army officers.¹⁶ An indirect collaboration of this constraint is provided by the Report of West Pakistan Land Reform Commission, 1958, which states "tenancy would continue to be the dominant feature of the tenure structure despite the present attempt at the redistribution of ownership in land and of making access to the land more free."¹⁷

Only about 2.3 million acres were thus subject to the legislation and of this 0.93 million acres that were acquired consisted of wastes, hills, and riverbeds.¹⁸ Yet in some cases the amount of land that was surrendered was considerable. For instance, the Nawab of Hoti is said to have surrendered 8,000 acres and Colonel Amir Khan, a former minister, surrendered approximately 13,000 acres.¹⁹ Similarly, a few other families reportedly gave up thousands of acres. Therefore, despite the transference of land to dependents and other members of the families, some large landowners did lose part of their holdings, but they were able to obtain a further income from compensation bonds.

16. A former advisor on land reform to President Ayub Khan told one of the authors (Sanderatne) that the President requested information to be collected on the extent of holdings of prominent army officers and their families and decided on the ceiling only when convinced that it would not affect them.

17. Government of West Pakistan, Report of the West Pakistan Land Reform Commission (Lahore, 1958), p. 58.

18. Food and Agricultural Organization, Agrarian Reform in Asia and the Far East (Bangkok 1970), p. 16.

19. H. Feldman, Revolution in Pakistan: A Study of Martial Law Administration (Oxford University Press, London, 1967), p. 60.

The land reforms did not, however, create a serious dent in the existing class structure. They did reduce the land holdings of some persons. But, with the ceilings as high as 500 to 1,000 acres and means of transferring land among family members, the existing landlord class continued with slightly diminished financial strength. Moreover, the payment of compensation meant that they derived an income from their old land holdings even though, no doubt, less than from the land itself. Bredo makes this point in an analysis of West Pakistan's land reforms:

recent land reform regulation in Pakistan will still leave a large landlord class, with estates considerably smaller than they were, it is true, but still substantially large. They will also reduce some of the economic and political power of this class, especially of certain individuals. But, on the whole, it is doubtful that the effect will be significant.²⁰

Recent technological developments in agriculture accentuated further the disparity in income of the rich landlord class and the peasants. As noted earlier, West Pakistan's agriculture is dependent on irrigation facilities. The availability of high yielding seed varieties which require controlled irrigation facilities and fertilizer inputs implies that only those who can afford these could reap the rewards of the Green Revolution. Between 1960-61 and 1964-65, 25,000 tube wells, each costing between Rs. 5000 and 12,000, with an estimated total cost of Rs. 250 million, were installed. Similarly, large

20. W. Bredo, "Land Reform and Development in Pakistan," p. 271.

investments were made in fertilizers.²¹ Needless to say these investments could not be undertaken by the majority of peasants. They were undertaken by the rich landlord class which remained after the tenure reform. This class facilitated Pakistan's rapid agricultural growth. But the large-scale agricultural technology with imported tractors adversely affected the bargaining capacity of tenants and small owner-farmers. The fact that Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's campaign in 1970 emphasized further tenure reform of an expropriatory nature and that it did not fall on deaf ears, supports the view that rapid agricultural development, together with economic disparities, leads to social tension and political dissatisfaction.

Role of Landowners in the Industrialization of West Pakistan

We now discuss the role and influence of landlords in the industrial development of Pakistan and the consequent class composition and class interests of the West Pakistani elite. The division of British India at independence into two nations on a religious basis resulted in an exodus from East Pakistan of the major portion of capitalist entrepreneurs, small industrialists, and other commercial interests, as they were Hindus. Vakil estimates that in Western Punjab nearly 80 percent of the industrial undertaking was owned by non-Muslims. He also shows that the majority of Pakistan's trade and the entire money market was controlled

21. Walter F. Falcon and Carl H. Gotsch, "Lessons in Agricultural Development - Pakistan," in Development Policy Theory and Practice, Gustav E. Papanek, ed. (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1965), pp. 269-315.

by non-Muslims.²² Their departure created a vacuum which had to be filled.

Papanek contends that the new industrialists and commercialists were not landowners but had a trading background. He cites as evidence a survey of prior occupations of private industrialists in 1959: according to this, only 17 percent were industrialists before 1947; as many as 45 percent came from among traders; small industry and handicrafts accounted for 18 percent, while agriculture for only 3 percent.²³ Papanek accounts for the small proportion of landlords as being due to their aversion to taking risks and the fact that the "landlords' ... traditional occupation had prestige and provided a steady income. The landlord's income was not sharply reduced after independence, unlike those of many traders."²⁴

Over time, however, a greater number of landlord interests were represented. The proved profitability of industrial enterprises, the larger capital requirements, and the threat to landlords from tenure reform may be some of the factors accounting for this. It is generally argued that West Pakistan's industrial class was a new one and not an old industrial class. However, the evidence for this claim is rather uncertain.

22. Quoted in Hana Papanek, "Pakistan's New Industrialists and Businessmen: Focus on the Memons," Paper presented to the Conference on Occupational Cultures in Changing South Asia, University of Chicago, 1971.

23. Gustav F. Papanek, Pakistan's Development: Social Goals and Private Incentives (Harvard University Press, Mass., 1967), p. 41.

24. Ibid., p. 43.

While the number of industrialists from the land-owning classes was few, the evidence does not demonstrate that the magnitude of their influence and control was small. The number of large landowners is small, and conspicuously so in the case of Pakistan. The fabled twenty-two families of West Pakistan who control industry, the civil service, and the military establishment are from the rich landlord class.

As Aftab points out:

The get-rich-quick story was experienced by only a handful of entrepreneurs that started small. Those that became empires are linked to the twenty-two families, whose fortunes were already established in British times. Some of them were--and still are--landlord families whose initial capital for empire-size commercial and industrial investment came from profits from agricultural exports, then commodity imports.²⁵

Therefore, even if the number of landlords in industrial enterprises is small, the influence and power wielded by them is significant. This can be illustrated by the fact that tractors are imported into Pakistan tax-free and at a lower exchange rate, and that tenure reform, even under the martial law administration, allowed them to retain most of their land possessions.

Besides the concentration of landlord and industrial interests, the two interests were able to collaborate. In contrast to Marx's exhortation for the working classes to unite because they have nothing to lose, in Pakistan it is precisely those who have the most to lose who have formed the most powerful combinations. Myrdal contends that

25. M. Aftab, "Pakistan's 22 Families," Insight (Hongkong) (September, 1971), p. 53.

in the first decade of Pakistan's independence, political power was exercised by "professional politicians, related to the Muslim hereditary landlords," and the "higher civil servants and army officers, like the League leaders, were also linked by birth or marriage to the Muslim landowners."²⁶ If the pre-Ayub Khan regime "represented the combined power of the higher civil servants, army officers, big industrialists, and landlords,"²⁷ then under Ayub Khan "the real levers of power" continued in the hands of the "upper class of landlords, civil servants, industrialists, and professional men."²⁸ Although the system was purged of some corrupt politicians and a few civil servants, the martial law itself continued to be an instrument of the rich capitalist classes--both landlords and industrialists.

In fact, the system of basic democracy was heavily weighted in favor of the richer classes. Myrdal points out:

On the contrary, the system of basic democracies has actually strengthened the position of the local landlords -- first, because it is easier for them to manipulate and intimidate a small electorate than a larger one, and second, because the candidates must reside in the locality, thus making it impossible to provide the peasants with alternative leadership.... The effect of the new system has thus been to associate the local landowners or their nominees with the official machinery of government.²⁹

The rapid industrial growth in the 1960's together with the introduction of the Green Revolution technology increased the economic power

26. Myrdal, Asian Drama, p. 309.

27. Ibid., p. 322.

28. Ibid., p. 324.

29. Ibid., p. 333.

and strength of a few families. By 1959 the concentration of economic power had proceeded to such an extent that only seven individuals, families or foreign corporations, controlled one-quarter of all private industrial assets and one-fifth of all industrial assets.³⁰ Only about 15 families owned approximately three-fourths of all shares in banks and insurance companies.³¹ More landlords, civil servants, and military officers were purchasing industrial interests and acquiring a stake in the economic policies, which were highly favourable to the vested interests. The total effect of this was an interest in the existing political system of a military dictatorship.

Irreconcilability of the Two Regions

Meanwhile, the economic policy of the West Pakistan-dominated central government was seriously discriminatory to East Pakistan. In 1970, official statistics show the per capita income in West Pakistan was over 60 percent that of East Pakistan, though some economists contend that in reality it was over 100 percent higher.³² The foreign exchange derived from East Pakistan's exports was largely expended on imports for the further industrialization of Pakistan. Similarly, only about one-third of foreign aid funds were expended on East Pakistan's development. In short, an inequitable relationship, widening the disparity in almost every field -- development, bureaucracy, armed forces,

30. Gustav Papanek, Pakistan's Development, p. 67.

31. Ibid., p. 68.

32. M. Anisur Rahman, "East Pakistan: The Roots of Estrangement," South Asian Review 3 (1970):235-39.

business--together with the loss of political participation provided the base for the estrangement between the two regions. Yahya Khan's efforts of 1970 - 71 were a threat to the vested economic interests of Pakistan since a constitution based on universal franchise, a federal parliamentary government with substantial provincial autonomy meant that East Pakistan would have a majority and hence, control the country's economic policies. If the East Pakistan politicians shared the same socio-economic background as their counterparts in West Pakistan and had been the frontmen of a capitalist class, then it might have been possible for the two countries to collaborate in a federal government and rule in the interests of this class in their respective spheres of influence. But, as we have seen, the very different agrarian structures and post-1947 developments of the two regions precluded such a possibility. In fact, the assumption of power by the leaders of East Pakistan, with a socialist philosophy and without commitment to any vested interests, implied policies that would seriously erode the economic strength of the capitalist-landlord classes of West Pakistan. It was this threat that was at the root of the irreconcilability³³ of the two wings of Pakistan.

33. The facts that no national political party could develop a following in both the regions and that in the 1970 elections the Awami League of East Pakistan and the People's party of West Pakistan could not secure even a single seat in West Pakistan and East Pakistan respectively, point to their irreconcilability.

The above analysis does not mean that the linguistic and cultural differences of the two regions did not play an important role. But, if it had not been for the divergent economic interests, and, more particularly, the domination of undivided Pakistan's politics by a capitalist class unresponsive to the demands of the people, policies could have been designed to alleviate these differences over time. In fact, the difficulties of the geographical discontinuity--the remoteness of power from the majority of the people--accentuated the other differences and provided Hindu-dominated India with the opportunity to discredit the "Two Nations Theory," on the basis of which British India had been divided in 1947, and to separate East Pakistan from the West by armed interference.

Summary

We may conclude by summarizing the argument advanced above. The two regions of Pakistan inherited very different agrarian structures at independence in 1947. East Pakistan had a series of tenancy reforms dating back to 1859, culminating in the exodus of the Hindu landlords in 1947 and the tenure reform of 1950, which abolished all rent-receiving interests and established a small-holding agriculture. Thus, the country did not have an affluent landlord class or the means for developing a capitalist industrial base. The discriminatory economic policies of the West-Pakistan-dominated central government resulted in a stagnant agriculture, and the lack of industrialization and economic opportunities. Therefore, while feudalism was destroyed, there was no emergence of an indigenous capitalist class wealthy and ambitious.

enough to control political power and influence public opinion. The dominant political philosophy that evolved out of the widespread poverty was a radically egalitarian one.³⁴ Its leadership is from the middle class--more lower-middle than upper-middle--with emotional and cultural ties to the proletariat and impoverished peasantry.

In contrast, West Pakistan inherited an agrarian structure which consisted of a few families owning large estates and a large number of peasants owning small holdings. Thus, until the martial law of 1959 tenure reforms could not be enacted. But even when the reforms were introduced they had only a peripheral influence as ceilings were placed at levels which excluded a large proportion of landholdings. Besides, rich Muslim refugees bought land as well as interests in the new industries. The vacuum created by the exodus of the Hindu industrialists was filled by these refugees, by traders, and, increasingly in later times, by landlords. Thus, the capitalist class in the city and the landlord interests in the country had strong bonds with each other and the civil service and military.

There was a gradual concentration of economic wealth in the hands of a few families--the fabled twenty-two were all from West Pakistan--and the manipulation of policies in their interests. Despite changes in the political leadership and military regimes, these dominant economic interests controlled the policy directions of the rulers from behind the scenes.

The nature of the control of political power in the two wings was diametrically different and arose mainly from the divergent agrarian

34. M. A. Rahman, "East Pakistan: The Roots of Estrangement," pp. 235-36.

structures that had developed. The return to a democratic constitutional form of government in such circumstances meant that the majority in East Pakistan would in the future control economic policies. Given the different class interest of the two regions it was a serious threat to the oligarchic regime and the economic interests West Pakistan represented. Hence the irreconcilability of the two regions that led to the political crisis of 1971 and the ultimate separation of East from West Pakistan.