

*Jahanzaib Khan*  
*Humaira Arif Dasti*  
*Abdul Rasheed Khan*

## **FEUDALISM IS A MAJOR OBSTACLE IN THE WAY OF SOCIAL MOBILITY IN PAKISTAN**

Pakistan is an under develop country. Pakistan faced political instability through out its history since 1947 to date. Then Pakistan was bound to face four martial laws due to instable political situation in the country. For under develop country like Pakistan stable political situation is must for the progress and for strong economy. Economy depends upon agriculture development and industrial development as well as mineral development. Pakistan was an agrarian economy but most part of land is occupied by feudal lords. These feudal lords also entered in politics and since its birth till now they are ruling the country. The feudalism is a major hurdle in the way of progress and prosperity of the country because the feudal lords do not let their subjects to be educated so that no one share their power. In this article an attempt is made to highlight the grim situation created by feudalism in Pakistan. Rural areas of Pakistan are severely damaged by this evil. However in urban areas there is decline of feudalism due to industrial development and education. But industrial sector is also going under the control of the feudal lords as they are shifting their investment to industry instead of agriculture. In rural Sindh and Baluchistan the situation is worse as compared to Punjab and K.P.K. It is the need of the hour to control this evil.

Pakistan after sixty five years is now an atomic power. There are about ten atomic powers in the world. Most of the atomic powers are world's most developed countries and among them majority of the countries have strong industrial base.

Pakistan also has a reliable industrial base but still far from develop countries. That is why it is still under develop country. But at the same time it was its industrial development which helped it for its survival after independence. There are many reasons which forced Pakistan to maintain status qua as an under develop country. In this article data is collected through primary and secondary sources and content analysis was made.

Pakistan is basically an agrarian economy. At the time of independence it inherited a feudal set up for agricultural land which harmed the roots of Pakistan economy severely. It has distorted the social and economic infrastructure and intensified the contradictions, creating a ravaged culture that is wreaking havoc on the ordinary inhabitants of this land.<sup>1</sup> The feudal lords not only controlled agricultural land but they also occupied political system and civil and military service in Pakistan. This is a force which checked the forces of progress and development in the country. Precisely due to their historical belatedness, economic and technological weakness, and the fragile nature of Pakistani capitalism, the ruling classes have failed to abolish feudalist remnants but paradoxically, incorporated the feudal aristocracy into the notorious nexus of the ruling elite.<sup>2</sup>

**Feudalism in Pakistan** has a stranglehold on the economy and politics of the nation. The feudal landlords have created states within a state where they rule their fiefs with impunity. The landlord's influence spans over the police, bureaucracy and judiciary.<sup>3</sup> Since its birth, Pakistan is run by the politicians who are mostly feudal. From Liaquat Ali Khan to present era, feudal occupied parliament and this is why, Pakistan is still an under develop country. The Bhuttos is one of the richest families of the subcontinent, The Bhuttos own around 40,000 acres (161874000 m<sup>2</sup> or 161.874 km<sup>2</sup>) of land in Sindh and assets worth billions of dollars.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to define Feudalism. But one thing is clear that this is a system in which poor men live a miserable life.

The prevailing form of political organization in western and central Europe during the middle Ages.

After the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century A.D. it had become increasingly difficult for any govt. to rule effectively over a large area. Feudalism a special method of local, rather than central, govt. that flourished from 900 to 1300 saved Europe from anarchy. Feudal govt. depended on personal agreements between a limited number of individuals became noblemen and usually had landed estates. They owed loyalty not to a nation, as modern men do, but only to other noblemen with whom they had made agreements.<sup>5</sup>

In history, feudalism (the term "feudalism" is used to describe pejoratively "anything reactionary, old-fashioned, or resonant of aristocratic values", Oxford Dictionary), has appeared in different forms. Feudalism is a system in which there is no change. Feudal lords do not permit their subjects to get education, acquire money, to improve their standard of living, to improve their social conditions. Even they are not allowed to perform religious duties without the approval of federal lord. They are bound to get permission for the marriages of their sons and daughters from the feudal Lords. The poor farmers are at the mercy of feudal lord. Thus the poor farmers have no right to change their status. They are forced to live in poverty. They have no opportunity to improve their status and they are not allowed to get education. Thus they do not have upward social mobility. The feudal archetype in Pakistan consists of landlords with large joint families possessing hundreds or even thousands of acres of land. They seldom make any direct contribution to agricultural production. Instead, all work is done by peasants or tenants who live at subsistence level.<sup>6</sup> The poor peasants are forced to live a miserable life whereas feudal lord enjoys all the comfort of life. Pakistan suffers not only from decadent feudalism but also from the primitive tribal system. Feudalism is further defined as follow;

Feudalism based on mutual relationships and loyalty. A peasant served his lord and perform military duties. In return a lord granted him land for Agriculture use on

inheritance. He was allowed to use his tan-dour after paying nominal dues. He was allowed to use his mill for preparing flour, his tools for wine production and his forest for cutting woods. Lord was aware of the importance of peasants. That was why he did not dismiss them. He tried to maintain them on the land.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout history, feudalism has appeared in different forms. To begin with, the Pakistan Muslim League, the party laying Pakistan's foundation 65 years ago, was almost wholly dominated by feudal lords such as the Zamindars, Jagirdars, Nawabs, Nawabzadas, Mansabdars, Arbabs, Makhdooms, and Sardars, the sole exception being the Jinnahs (merchants and lawyers) and the Sharifs (industrialists).<sup>8</sup> Pakistan's major political parties are feudal-oriented, and more than two-thirds of the National Assembly (lower house of the legislature) is composed of this class. Besides, most of the key executive posts in the provinces are held by them.<sup>9</sup>

A feudal lord does not let the forces of modernity or progress to enter into his area. Because he thinks that this will prove harmful to his rule. Though the decline to feudalism started in Pakistan but still feudal lords control the game of politics in Pakistan. Pakistan is still an under develop country due to unfair policies of these feudal lords. Although the system has weakened over the years through increased industrialization, urbanization and land reforms such as those introduced by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.<sup>10</sup> But oligarchs still hold much power in the politics of Pakistan due to their financial backing, rural influence and family led politics which involves whole families to be in politics at any one time and cross marriages between large feudal families to create greater influence. Many children of feudal families are also argued to take up bureaucratic roles to support family agendas.<sup>11</sup>

A feudal lord controls his subjects through force. They are very loyal creatures to the feudal lords. Their lives remain on the mercy of feudal lords. The landlord, by virtue of his ownership and control of such vast amounts of land and human

resources, is powerful enough to influence the distribution of water, fertilizers, tractor permits and agricultural credit and, consequently exercises considerable influence over the revenue, police and judicial administration of the area. Some time landlord acts like God. This landlord provides a small quantity of output from the land so that they should remain alive for plough in his land in future. The landlord is, thus, lord and master. Such absolute power can easily be corrupt, and it is no wonder that the feudal system there is humanly degrading.<sup>12</sup>

The feudal lords keep the tempo of progress checked. They do not let their subjects to get facilities. They act like an agent of status quo. They hate speedy progress and development. They check progressive elements in their area. They wish to prolong their rule through force and violence. They do not bother to follow any law. Here is very good analysis in this regard:

If we examine the Institution of feudalism then we will find three elements in it. Slavery of peasants, Jagir and se of Jagir as economic unit. When these three elements are strong then in result there will be decline of trade but also the population of cities will not increase. So whenever there will be increase in the population of cities and progress in trade, there feudalism will become weak. Because peasants get opportunity to work in the cities and They will be agree to leave the village.<sup>13</sup>

Through the 50s and the 60s the feudal families retained control over national affairs through the bureaucracy and the armed forces. Later on in 1972, they assumed direct power and retained it until the military regained power recently.<sup>14</sup> Thus, any political observer can see that this oligarchy, albeit led by and composed of different men at different times, has been in power since Pakistan's inception.<sup>15</sup> The feudal families still have strong grip on the politics and they are always part of ruling elite. Usually this feudal class is not sincere to the country. They became part of ruling elite so that they can multiple their wealth which they normally acquire through unfair means. They after

entering into government machinery start work to legalize this money and sometime they make efforts to transfer this money to their foreign accounts so that they may enjoy the life after a dull service in politics in Pakistan.

Feudal lords consider poor farmers or village men as their personal goods. They do not let them to do something for their own welfare or for the welfare of their children or family. When a state encourage businessmen then feudal lords put restrictions to the movement of peasants because their lands depends upon the labour of these peasants.<sup>16</sup> Thus the sole objective of a feudal lord is to keep their subjects backward and under their tight control so that they should not have upward social mobility because if they will have upward social mobility, there will be improvement in their standard of living and status and they will not work to fulfill the evil designs of their masters and there will be no man to work for the feudal lords to produce for their livelihood.

Pakistan remained under the grip of feudal lords. Even before partition the area forming part of Pakistan was in the grip of feudal lords. The Sultans and later Mughal nourished the institution of feudalism in sub-continent. Later British Empire used this institution to control the vast empire of India. After partition almost all Pakistani government directly or indirectly promoted the feudalism and almost all government are formed by these feudal lords. Feudalism is may be defined as a behavior in which a feudal lord act like a King or as an arrogant master. This can be defined as an attitude of selfishness and arrogance on the part of the landlords. It is all attitude nurtured by excessive wealth and power, while honesty, justice, love of learning and respect for the law have all but disappeared.<sup>17</sup> Feudalism is the root of all evils in Pakistan. Corruption, favoritism, fundamentalism, provincialism, and all other social evils are out come of this single feudal mentality. The feudal lord encourage criminal to show his power to his subjects. The criminal do crimes like theft, rape and even murder for the sake of the feudal lord. They kidnapped people if feudal lord is angry with him and rest of life that poor fellow live in a private prison

created by the feudal lord. Having such a mentality, when members of feudal families obtain responsible positions in civil service, business, industry and politics, their influence is multiplied in all directions.<sup>18</sup> Thus feudalism is mother of all evils.

Indeed the worsening moral, social, economic and political crisis facing this country can be attributed mainly to the powerful feudal influences operating there.<sup>19</sup> A feudal lord usually appear to be a cruel master who do not let his subjects to enjoy basic necessities of life and to claim basic human rights like right of speech and education, health , etc. All they do it to prolong their rule over their subjects. In Pakistan no serious effort was made to eliminate this social evil and after 65 years of its independence it is still an under develop country. Land reforms were made in Pakistan to check this growing evil but did not prove fruitful to control it. So since independence to date, Pakistan is in the grip of feudalism. The feudal lords are very clever. In Pakistan, when they realized that now they could not got benefit out of land holding, they sold them and invested their money in industrial sector. Here they enjoy loans from bank and when get power, they try to write-off their loans. Our majority of politicians are either landlord or industrialist since independence.

So we see that how powerfully feudal lords crushed the poor peasants under their control. Rather they damaged the whole system of government in the country. They destroyed all institutions in the country and changed the shape of social customs and moral values. A word uttered by a lord becomes law in our country. Less then fifty feudal families played with the wishes and aspirations of the people of Pakistan. The feudal lord even consider the family of poor peasants as booty. Their wives and daughters are their booty. They have the license to rape them. They kill these poor soul for their pleasure. They forced them to lick their feet for getting some relief. In Pakistan the severe kind of feudalism is there in rural Sindh area. Where the feudal lords are like their gods. They have the right to let a man to live or finish his life

whenever they desire. Here is a picture of these poor people under the shadow of feudal lords;

In the tribal and feudal structure existing in Sind there was little scope for a middle class. However, the local chiefs, arbabs, maqaddams petty officials, traders, shopkeepers and artisans may be designated as occupying the position of a middle class. As the chiefs and the arbabs were traditional leaders also and served as a link between the administration and people, they generally held the lion's share of tribal lands and wealth.<sup>20</sup>

The feudal did not let middle class people to change their status or position and to move from middle class to upper class because they did not wish to share their authority and power. Let us watch another picture of these poor people;

They maintained peace and harmony in their tribes. The chiefs loyal to the government were allowed to help government officials in realizing revenues for which they were given commission in these revenues and were designated as arbabs and maqaddams. Among the Baluch tribes the power of the tribal chiefs was still more firmly established. In fact this class comprised the true aristocracy of the land and was a part and parcel of the local social structure.<sup>21</sup>

Some efforts were made to check this evil but these efforts were not sufficient to eradicate this evil totally from our society. In 1959 Ayub carry out land reforms under the instructions of Robert McNamara (head of the World Bank at the time)<sup>22</sup>, the limit for private ownership of land was fixed at 500 acres irrigated and another 1000 acres non-irrigated. The government managed to express its generosity to feudal lords by bestowing productivity exemptions as well as granting heavy compensation to the landowners for uncultivated land.<sup>23</sup> Instead of benefiting the landless/poor farmers, the reform had a reverse effect on them. Rather these reforms miserably failed to abolish

convoluted semi-feudal structures.<sup>24</sup> The citizens witnessed another “genuine” attempt by the government in 1972 to ameliorate social/economic condition of farmers when it introduced the second land reform. Once again, deception and the preservation of the status quo was given priority over the redistribution of land from the rural elite to the destitute.<sup>25</sup> With the old bourgeois state apparatus, these reforms could not have been accomplished.<sup>26</sup> Thus Feudal lords have tight grip over poor farmers so far. Now there were government reports which confirmed that agrarian reforms were necessary to increase output in the country. Feudal masses do nothing but claim more from poor farmers and they do not provide any financial help to improve the land. Thus a poor tenant is bound to live under the shadows of poverty. According to government reports the situation of the poor farmer is as follow;

When the terms of share-cropping permit an absentee-owner to get too large a share and bear too little of the cost and offer the tenant too little security, the tenant is discouraged from adopting improved methods which cost him more in money and effort.<sup>27</sup>

A more forceful indictment of the system was made by the Land Reforms Commission.

Initiative and enterprise are absent; there is no security for those engaged in production; reward proportionate to effort is absent and incentive for greater production is lacking. There is no encouragement for capital formation and productive investment in agriculture. In many areas power is concentrated in the hands of a privileged few which hampers the free exercise of political rights and stifles the growth of democracy and democratic institutions.<sup>28</sup>

Thus this feudalism always acted as an agent of status quo to promote their selfish motives. A feudal lord give life saving drug to his peasants so that they should not die. This life-saving medicine is the food which a lord

left for their peasants, after taking away all the produce from them.

The feudal lords, with massive amounts of mortgaged capital, invested massively in industry and the service sector. Pseudo-landlords became pseudo-capitalists.<sup>30</sup> Similarly these feudal lords held high position in army and civil service as well as almost all Pakistani politicians are feudal. Almost half of Pakistan's Gross National Product and the bulk of its export earnings are derived primarily from the agricultural sector controlled by a few thousand feudal families. Armed with a monopoly of economic power, they easily pre-empted political power. Thus there are very few efforts to uplift poor segment of the society and poor becoming more poor and rich more rich and society is divided into two groups; have and have not.

A feudal lord keep his subjects dependent on him. Like Beckett portrait in his drama, 'waiting for Godot'. Here he narrated the episode of a feudal lord, 'Pozzo' and his servant or slave, 'lucky'. He hold his servant with a rope, other side was fix round his neck. When he need his attention, he pulled the rope. Further he himself eat chicken and use wine. But he forced his servant to eat the used bones of chicken. So this type of harsh treatment a feudal lord give to his servants and peasants.

Agricultural land still remains a potent symbol of power in today's Pakistan. The urban elite's penchant for farmhouses is mimicking landlords. Furthermore, the occupants of these farmhouses replicate "the decadent lifestyle of the old nawabs and the feudal elite" by holding "huge parties, mujrahs and ... flaunting ... money".

Many members in the national and provincial legislatures have landed backgrounds. Rural Pakistan continues to languish under the yoke of 'feudalism'. Honour killings occur there, helpless peasants are exploited by the mighty landlord. The electronic media has perpetuated this same image for years. In Punjab, it was Chaudhri Hashmat of the drama serial Waris

who reigned supreme. Since land is a symbol of power and these are the kind of social practices we won't associate with modernity, Pakistan is deemed a predominantly feudal society.

This feudal elite has migrated into politics, where it exerts huge influence. And just as the heartlessness of feudal and capitalist barons in the 19th century created space for Communists, so in Pakistan this same lack of compassion for ordinary people seems to create space for Islamists.

At that time of independence in 1947, Pakistan faced many problems and as a developing country in South Asia having burden of millions of refugees from India, its agriculture remained under-develop and industry almost non-existent. Then there were Feudal lords occupying a very large portion of agricultural land in Pakistan. But within few years the country began to control the situation, it was able to settle refugees, it established a viable industrial base and was capable to use machinery, fertilizers and pesticides for improving its agricultural output.

From 1947 to 1953, agriculture remained sluggish due to ( a ) influx of refugees from India, ( b ) allotment of land to non-agriculturist refugees which reduced interest on farmers and ( c ) lack of technological change. In the first six year planning programme (1951-57) which was suspended two years before its completion, in it emphasis was laid on establishing of industries. Agriculture remained stagnant during this period, rather declined due to an increase in water-logging and salinity. Pakistan had to import over 1 million tons of wheat in 1952 to meet the acute food shortage. The Planning machinery then, realized that agriculture should not remain neglected and it should develop along with industry.

In the First Five Year Plan (1955-60), it was mentioned that with increasing population, rapid industrialization, growing urbanization and substantial increase in money supply, a constant and rapid increase in food-grain was essential to

maintain economic stability and provide a base for economic growth. This sector, however, remained neglected till 1958 due to various reasons. The lack of adequate institutional credit system, absentee landlordism, uneconomic holdings, defective land tenure system, no land reforms, etc., etc., adversely affected the agricultural productivity. The average annual growth rate of agriculture sector was 1.3% from 1955-58, while the population was thus growing at a much faster rate than the growth rate of agriculture output. The major cause of slow output agriculture sector is mainly due to feudal landholding in Pakistan.

This feudal system has made the people of Pakistan pathetic. It is the need of the hour to chalk out a comprehensive plan to get rid of this feudal elite class. It is time that Pakistan should be run by sincere young and patriot Pakistani who will work efficiently and will leave no stone unturned to make this country a progressive Islamic Welfare State as dreamed by our founder Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

It is time to eradicate feudalism totally as our Islam provided the lesson of equality. It is essential for an Islamic Welfare State that all citizens of the State should be treated equally according to Islamic social justice. India which is non Muslim country, introduced land reforms which abolish landholding totally but Pakistan even after sixty five years is not able to get rid of it. In Pakistan, for the uplift and development of agriculture sector it is essential to introduce land reforms immediately. There should be more efforts on the part of government to enhance scope of education in the country and especially in rural areas to combat this evil. In this regard a public private partnership can produce better result. In the end it is hoped that in very near future, Pakistan will be free from feudalism.

### **Notes and References**

1. Lal Khan, Is Pakistan a feudal society? [www.defence.pk/forums/current-events-soical-issues/197294-pakistan-society.html#ixzz22mvy\\_v357](http://www.defence.pk/forums/current-events-soical-issues/197294-pakistan-society.html#ixzz22mvy_v357)

2. Ibid.
3. Times of Karachi, facts reporter, feudalism in Pakistan, January, 2011.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. New Standard Encyclopedia (Chicago: Standard Educational Corporation).
7. T. J Byres & Harbans Mukhia ed., Feudalism in European Societies, London: 1985, pp.225.275
8. Times of Karachi, Feudalism in Pakistan.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Lal Khan, Is Pakistan a feudal society?
13. S. R. Sen, Growth and stability in Indian agriculture, Waltair, January, 1967.
14. Times of Karachi, Feudalism in Pakistan.
15. Ibid.
16. S. R. Sen, Growth and stability in Indian agriculture.
17. Times of Karachi, Feudalism in Pakistan.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ansar, Arbabs of Sindh, J.P.H.S. vol. xxii, part 1, January, 1974 also quoted in Ansar Zahid Khan, History & Culture(Karachi: Royal book Company), 1980, pp.196.205.
21. Ibid.
22. Lal Khan, Is Pakistan a feudal society?
23. Faiza Hussain (feudalism, reforms, urban) the obstacle in social mobility in Pakistan, 24-10-2003 [www.chowk.com/articles/6621](http://www.chowk.com/articles/6621).
25. Lal Khan, Is Pakistan a feudal society?

26. Faiza Hussain(feudalism, reforms, urban).
27. Lal Khan, Is Pakistan a feudal society?
28. Ibid.
29. Government of Pakistan, Food & Agriculture Commission, 1960.
30. Land Reform Commission report, 1959.