

BOOK REVIEW

Karamat Ali, Pakistan : The political economy of rural development
(Vanguard Publications, Lahore, 1982) pp. 381, Rs. 175.00

Putting together a collection of articles is not an easy task. The area covered by the present book under review is extremely diverse and thus makes the selection doubly difficult. By corollary, to review such a collection presents peculiar difficulties. Almost all of the articles in the book have been previously published elsewhere. The exceptions include the first (by Karamat Ali) which provides an introduction to the overall problems of rural development and agricultural modernisation in Pakistan. Since this article is by the editor and is also the first in the collection, I am assuming that it attempts to set the general tone of the book and provides an insight into the various problems that are to be dealt with. Unfortunately the book does not state explicitly where and when each of the articles was previously published. The list of authors is indeed impressive and the collection includes some very well known articles covering the social, political and economic aspects of rural development in Pakistan. Since some of the articles need little introduction and it would require too much time and space to review each article separately it would be best to review the book as a whole and refer to specific articles where relevant or necessary.

The first part of the book contains the more well known pieces – some that are now considered to be amongst the best in their field, such as the one by Hamza Alavi entitled 'The Rural Elite and Agricultural Development in Pakistan' and the one by Cownie, Johnston and Duff entitled 'The Quantitative Impact of the Seed Fertilizer Revolution in West Pakistan: An Exploratory Study'. Karamat Ali's opening chapter spells out the potential impact of the modernisation of agriculture on all aspects of the rural order. These cover 'structural, institutional, social and political changes' (p.2). This statement articulates the broad goals of the book and the diversity of its scope. Ali warns against a strictly technocratic evaluation of modernisation and the tendency of most economists to study and propagate the impact of technological change purely on production and productivity. Valuable suggestions are made regarding other aspects of the problem that need to be systematically researched.

The next three chapters which include the two mentioned above and a third by Gotsch on the impact of tractor mechanisation on rural development cover the period of the 1960s. The Alavi piece examines critically the effects of the so-called 'Green Revolution' on the structure of agrarian society. An incisive exercise in political economy, this article strongly slates the worsening (as a result of the new technology) of the distribution of rural incomes and the reinforcement and strengthening of the inequitable rural power structure. The Gotsch article strikes a middle ground between the Alavi piece and the one by Cownie, et. al. The latter is a detailed study of the impact of the new seed varieties of wheat and rice and chemical fertilizers on agricultural production in West Pakistan. It does not analyse the effect on the agrarian structure of the adoption of any new technology, simply the effect on growth in production and productivity of foodgrains. The Gotsch article looks at both the growth aspect and the effect on the rural order due to the use of tractors in the Punjab. The diverse implications of the disequilibrating growth process on the one hand and mounting inequalities on the other, are forcefully presented and argued.

The rest of the articles in the book also range from the technocratic to the more broad based political and economic analyses of technological change. The chapter by Muhammad Naseem is a more technical piece that uses linear programming techniques to explore the relationship between technical change, farm size and the availability of credit. The piece by Mahmood Hasan Khan analyses the relationship between land productivity and farm size and the implications for land redistribution.

The impact of the Green Revolution on the consolidation of land holdings and the effect on tenant displacement are the subject of two other chapters. There is a related essay by Nimal Sanderaine on the impact of the 1959 and 1972 land reforms.

The last article is by Akmal Hussain titled 'Technical Change and Social Polarisation in Rural Punjab'. This article is a logical extension and updating of the ideas expressed by Alavi and Gotsch in the earlier chapters. Based upon the author's doctoral thesis the piece is a cogent analysis of the effects of technical change on the social relations of production. The article critically examines the interrelationship between the agrarian structure and technical change and demonstrates how a regressive rural order can (and indeed has) led to skewed rural development resulting in a worsening of the rural distribution of incomes and inequality. This piece is a fitting last chapter to the collection.

There are two chapters that in themselves are most informative but seem to be out of place with the rest. One is a descriptive analysis of the agricultural taxation system in Pakistan and the other an evaluation of the planning and management of water resources.

One shortcoming of the collection — and this is, in fact, a shortcoming of all agricultural research in Pakistan — is a tendency to consider Punjab agriculture and all agriculture in Pakistan as one and the same. This completely neglects the Lower Indus Basin which is, though less important in relative terms, no less interesting. Such an attitude has been prevalent for a long time and tends to be self-perpetuating. Since all research must rely on past work for guidance and direction, the neglect of the Lower Indus Basin is likely to persist unless concerted efforts are made to overcome this deficiency.

The book is an extremely valuable collection that would be of immense use for teaching purposes. It presents some of the better pieces on the subject that have been written in the last couple of decades. Various aspects of the problems associated with rural development are presented as a collection, for the first time. This, in itself, is enough of a reason for all those interested in the subject to study the book.

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