

## **Food Sovereignty in Pakistan: A Human Rights Struggle**

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### **Abstract**

La Via Campesina, the International Peasant's Movement, finds its roots in peasant agriculture and empowers farmers towards food sovereignty which promotes social justice and dignity, and allows them to escape the shackles of the corporate world that wishes to throw off peasants' agricultural model. In terms of agricultural history and agrarian justice, for the last couple of decades, Pakistan has been susceptible to land reforms with a hue of inequality, with wealth accumulated mainly in the hands of multinational companies and the state institutions. Peasants and farmers have long struggled to gain ownership of the agricultural land they have tilled for years; however, they have been deprived of it as a result of ever-growing ideologies such as capitalism and feudalism, where markets and institutions such as the state are the two main actors that intervene to selectively gain control over the poor and make them landless. At the Okara Military Farms, the poor and landless peasants and farmers are seen fighting at the forefront where they were recognised internationally for their efforts in highlighting the need for food sovereignty and equal proprietary rights in land. Moreover, Pakistan Kissan Movement Tehreek, one of the most famous organisations which advocates for a fair and equitable distribution of agricultural land and food security, is observed speaking the language of food sovereignty and seeks to have a tightened control over the manufacture and production of food they grow. However, it is the ultimate aim of La Via Campesina to recognise all sorts of rights encompassed in the UN Peasants' Rights Declaration that and envisage broader equality and inclusivity in human rights. Hence, in essence, there is a need for the State to control free-market and put restrictions on trade across borders, so transnational corporations are pushed back a little for peasants to survive and get incentivised through the right to food sovereignty. Despite this movement being a bottom-up approach and only defended by weak links as noticed by research, Pakistan can be said to soon face a paradigm shift from a struggle for land ownership to a struggle for food sovereignty.

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## **Introduction**

In 1996, peasants and farmers from different parts of America gathered together in protest for their rights encompassing land and agriculture, under what was termed as the right to food sovereignty at the International Peasant's Movement: La Via Campesina.<sup>1</sup> This mobilisation and awareness of the historical and socio-economic struggle faced by poor peasants and farmers allowed for food sovereignty to be coined in the following words: "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."<sup>2</sup> Pakistani politics and history both have had a number of phases where the *kissan* has been a victim of land reform, land eviction, free trade, and globalization as a whole. The peasants and small or landless farmers in Pakistan have tirelessly fought for ownership of their ancestral land after acres and hectares of it were bestowed upon the military, or other corporations, who desired to bring more to the economy through their production process than those who ploughed the lands themselves. This paper aims to focus on the history and politics of the two most important land redistribution movements in Pakistan and how peasants and farmers have articulated their struggle in terms of land rights, and if with time, such mobilisation has started speaking the language of food sovereignty. Moreover, it will also emphasize whether this transition from recognition of land rights to a fight for food sovereignty was fruitful, if at all, to make the agricultural system more food secure, and if this struggle is vulnerable to the critique of food sovereignty by the prevalent corporate food regime.

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<sup>1</sup> La Via Campesina is "an international movement bringing together millions of peasants, small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. Built on a strong sense of unity, solidarity between these groups, it defends peasant agriculture for food sovereignty as a way to promote social justice and dignity and strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture that destroys social relations and nature." <<https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/>> accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Nosheen Ali and Amna Tanveer Yazdani, 'Seed Policy in Pakistan: The Impact of New Laws on Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Development' (2017) 7 (1) *Lahore Journal of Policy Studies* 79.

## **Historical Background**

Prior to the British Raj, Indian agriculture was mainly dominated by subsistence farming where the farmer usually produced enough food to feed himself and the agricultural people of his small village community.<sup>3</sup> There was not a long chain of business transactions with the outside market because the surplus of the crops was often stored to use in lean years in case the yield exceeded consumption due to favourable climatic conditions. However, after this period, agriculture was deeply impacted due to the growing imbalance between population and the resources provided by the British rule. In the pre-British era, the idea of absolute ownership or private property rights did not exist. However, all classes associated with a piece of land possessed certain rights. It was not until the colonial rule began that “new land tenures, new land ownership concepts, tenancy changes and heavier demand for land revenue brought havoc changes, both in rural economy and social web.”<sup>4</sup> Through taking all the cultivable land under their ownership, the British relied heavily on land revenue systems to sustain functioning of the state. All cultivable land was subjected to one of the three: 1) a landlord based system also known as zamindari, 2) an individual cultivator-based system called raiyatwari, and 3) a village-based system named mahalwari.<sup>5</sup> The system was designed with the intention to extract the maximum amount of revenue from the Indian peasantry.

Moreover, to illustrate the theoretical notions that governed land and reform in pre- and post-independence Pakistan, Haris Gazdar outlines four phases of the subcontinent’s agricultural transitions, out of which agrarian reform was only one of the four rounds. Firstly, he discusses the time in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century where colonial settlements of the British Empire existed in the area we now call Pakistan. The breakup of the British Indian Empire and independence from the colonial rule marked the end of the first round, and simultaneously led to the second round of inevitable migration and displacement, which initiated widespread human sufferings and lack of

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<sup>3</sup> Timo Myllytaus and Naresh Chandra Sourabh, ‘Changing land ownership, agricultural, and economic systems’ (Environment and Society Portal) <<http://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/famines-india/changing-land-ownership-agricultural-and-economic-systems>> accessed 03 May 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Hareet Kumar Meena, ‘Land Tenure Systems in the late 18th and 19th century in Colonial India’ (2015) 9 (1) *AIJRHASS* 66.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

economic opportunities as part and parcel of control over land. While the third round encircles the attempts made by the state to initiate administrative land reform for approximately three decades starting from 1949; this failed to recognise the fundamental social structures which existed in the agricultural diaspora and could not connect the dots of land reform for various classes. However, the most present and relatable phase that Gazdar illustrates is the one linked with “markets and private property rights”.<sup>6</sup> While he looks at this idea of creating land markets as an institutionalised concept, and not easy to get through, I accept the phase as that of global capitalism while considering it so in terms of land for food sovereignty, which will be discussed later in this article.

The state’s attempt to take-over land from large landowners and allot it to the landless or land-poor was just another failed venture of redistributing land because even though “inequality in land ownership has been blamed...for poverty, social and technological backwardness, and political disempowerment”, it was also increasing exponentially due to the great “political power wielded by the land-owning classes”.<sup>7</sup> Land reforms have conventionally been viewed as the structural change which was needed for agrarian economy and agricultural assets to feed on. However, after numerous efforts by General Ayub Khan and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto were put forth to set caps on the size of agricultural land a person could own, land reforms could not survive long enough. Political leadership by Zia chanted the slogan that land reforms (i.e. giving landless or poor peasants a fair or equitable share in landowning) were in contravention with Islamic precepts due to which land reforms fell into abeyance.<sup>8</sup>

Land ownership and concentration in the hands of a select few, i.e. the modern elite class, had devastating economic and socio-political consequences in our so-called democratic welfare state.<sup>9</sup> Even though, the Punjab Tenancy (Amendment) Act 1952 restricted the landlord’s share at 40

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Haris Gazdar, *The Fourth Round, And Why They Fight On: An Essay on the History of and Reform in Pakistan*, Collective for Social Science Research (2009)  
<[http://www.researchcollective.org/Documents/The\\_Fourth\\_Round.pdf](http://www.researchcollective.org/Documents/The_Fourth_Round.pdf)> accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Robert M. Hathaway and Wilson Lee, *Islamisation and the Political Economy* (Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars Asia Program, 2004) 116.

<sup>9</sup> Mustaq Ahmed, Land Reforms in Pakistan (1959) 12 (1) *Pakistan Horizon* 30.

percent of the gross production, it ensured occupancy tenants held 7 percent of the total cultivated land, a revival to become full proprietors, abolishing non-military jagirs. However, this only took place on paper in statute, but in reality, the jagirs remained stored and intact as before, with little to no change for tenants to own a larger share in landholdings, and occupancy tenants being denied an opportunity to acquire proprietary rights over their properties.<sup>10</sup> What proved to be an even serious deterrent to the agricultural produce of the tenants was the policy of *laissez faire* that was hit by a lack of check and balances by the state and the minimalistic role and intervention of the government in the agricultural sphere.<sup>11</sup> Where landlords were least interested in the improvement and development of lands for the better, the beneficiaries of the increased outputs by the tenants were none other than the landlords.

The land reforms introduced by Ayub Khan were the first of its kind of legislation pertaining to land reforms in Pakistan. Some of the most salient features of the West Pakistan Land Reforms Regulation 1959 (Regulation 64 of 1959) were the introduction of ceilings on individual land holdings.<sup>12</sup> Individuals were prohibited to own more than a particular size of irrigated and non-irrigated land and the remaining acres of land was redistributed amongst the tenants and others. Ayub Khan's reforms further led to provision of security and safeguard for tenants and prevented subdivision of land holdings to avoid disadvantaging the poor. Hence, these land reforms were successful in providing a sense of greater equality in a rational land tenure policy that would ensure land rights and economic security of increased agricultural produce. These were to in turn improve and better the standard of living in rural communities and advocate for a more equitable distribution of income, hence providing the poor tenants with a promise that they will no longer be deprived of the legitimate and rightful fruit of their toil, unlike the earlier deprivation they had been subject to. Despite deliberately setting the redistribution ceiling high, many landlords tried to get around the redistribution scheme by gifting land to relatives or finding exemptions within the policy applicable on reforms, hence creating hurdles for the poor and landless to own land.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Holly Sims, 'Economic Imperatives, Political Risks, and Modes of Action: Agricultural Policy Implementation in India and Pakistan (1993) 27 (2) *The Journal of Developing Areas* 146, 149, 156.

<sup>12</sup> 'Land Reforms in Pakistan' (Dawn, 11 October 2010) <<https://www.dawn.com/news/570487>> accessed 04 May 2020.

Moreover, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's party which was predicated on populist sentiments worked primarily on mobilizing the poor masses in order to include them within the traditional discourse of pro-poor reform, but failed to immediately have effect due to the presence of the powerful landed elite.<sup>13</sup> It was when the 1972 land reforms were reinforced in 1977 under the pretext of withdrawing the provisions of land exemption granted to religious institutions, that the religio-political lobbies stood in opposition and challenged the new change in court. This resulted in courts declaring land reforms un-Islamic.<sup>14</sup> Hence, during Bhutto's time, the critique and pressure of large land owners in creating hindrances and barriers for the poor and landless peasants to own cultivable land or be benefitted by agrarian reforms remained effective in ensuring that land remains accumulated in the hands of the powerful and their next of kin or subordinates.<sup>15</sup> The lack of implementation of the newly promulgated 1977 reforms led to the same irregularities that had disappointed peasants earlier too and soon they began to express their discontent with Bhutto's unattainable policies.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of changing land reforms, Pakistan experienced a dire need for agrarian justice where small farm cultivation was proving to be better than large land farms. The latter's need to cultivate huge quantities of single crops (monoculture) with just one or two crops all year round - in order to take advantage of the heavy machinery the farmers had employed on their large size lands - to date, proves to be hostile for lands which once used to be fertile before they were taken over by corporations that are interested in larger lands and similar (limited types of) yields rather than crop rotation and environment-friendly techniques. Research and experiment by the Sustainable Policy Development Institute proved that small farmers were in a better position to make productive use of the agriculture and irrigation resources and used intensive labour techniques which were absent from large farm cultivation. It was also beneficial and advantageous for the land and soil when fewer chemical fertilizers and insecticides were used on lands by small

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<sup>13</sup> Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Summary: Gender and Land Reforms in Pakistan.

<sup>14</sup> *Qazalbash Waqf v Chief Land Commissioner* PLD 1990 SC 99.

<sup>15</sup> Shahruc Rafi Khan and others, 'The Case for Land and Agrarian Reforms in Pakistan' (2001) 12 *SDPI Policy Brief Series* 9.

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Abrar Zahoor, 'History and Politics of Land Reforms in Pakistan: A Case Study of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Era' (2018) 31 (2) *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 124.

farmers ensuring better productivity and agricultural produce out of smaller sizes of land.

This historical background helps mould the following discussion below of how the need for land redistribution and small farmers ensure the idea of food security, which is the availability of food and one's access to it. However, food security is the concept which helps one understand the struggle which these farmers and peasants have long been involved in to internalize the goals of food sovereignty that they strive to achieve each day, every year, in the face of restraint posed by the state actors, global trade institutions and corporate markets.

### **Role of Peasants and Farmers in Claiming Land Rights and The Right to Food Sovereignty**

The above mentioned background leads us to explore the paradigm shift from the struggle for land rights to an understanding of self-determination among peasants and recognition of a more inclusive peasant right – the right to food sovereignty: the right of communities who are producing food to control the way their food is manufactured, traded and consumed by people.<sup>17</sup> “The right to food sovereignty has not been claimed as an individual right, but rather as the right of communities, states, peoples or regions.”<sup>18</sup> As a ramification of this right, a number of other rights branch out for the recognition of these people, such as the right to self-determination, the right to development, and the right to permanent sovereignty over natural resources.

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<sup>17</sup> The right to food sovereignty has also primarily infringed in Pakistan, in the last two decades where farmers in South Punjab previously used to grow cotton; but due to the interference of established sugar manufacturing factories and the State, the peasantry was forced to shift to undertake cultivation of sugarcane and instead become involved in the sugar industry. This is one of the ways that farmers have been multifariously subjected to victimization by a new class of industrialists cum politicians.

<sup>18</sup> Priscilla Claeys, ‘From Food Sovereignty to Peasant’s Rights: an Overview of Via Campesina’s Struggle for New Human Rights,’ La Via Campesina’s Open Book: Celebrating 20 Years of Struggle and Hope <<https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/05/EN-02.pdf>> accessed 17 May 2019. Also see, Raj Patel, ‘Grassroots voices: What does food sovereignty look like?’ (2009) 36(3) *Journal of Peasant Studies* 663–706, He has defined food sovereignty as: “The rights of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant....”

According to Priscilla Claeys, this realm of recognising food sovereignty, is in and of itself divided into two dimensions, the internal which speaks the language of the “right of a people to choose its own political, economic and social system,”<sup>19</sup> and an external dimension – “the right of states to develop their agriculture.”<sup>20</sup> On one hand, the internal dimension empowers the citizen to build the bridge between his right to land and production of food, and on the other hand, the right of the State to take decisions regarding its agricultural system is enshrined in a sovereign character that, for some, cannot be disregarded. However, in light of the perspectives of peasants and farmers, it is of utmost importance to emphasize on the relation of food sovereignty with the objectives of the struggle posed in land ownership. It indicates how further call for food sovereignty will help peasants develop a deepened historical background of achieving the link between ownership of production, trade, and consumption of the food grown on their own lands.

### **Anjuman Mazareen Punjab (AMP)**

Between 2000 and 2003, a mass struggle of proprietary rights began in Punjab where a number of tenants - especially the unprecedented and spontaneous participation of large number of women - declared their rightful share in the land and property they had been tilling for years before it fell into the hands of a military government that came into power as a result of the 1999 coup *d’etat*. That very struggle proclaimed in the name of land ownership in the heartland of Okara Military Farms – our country’s previously predominant military landholding – was manifested by none other than the Anjuman Muzareen Punjab (AMP). The Anjuman Muzareen Punjab (AMP), also known as the Tenant’s Association of Punjab was formed as a result of Musharraf’s proposal to let the army take ownership of the land by replacing the *battai* system (sharecropping based on 50/50 percent division of harvest yield as rent) with that of creating three to seven years leases at subsidized rates for the ‘then-turned’ landless peasants of the province.<sup>21</sup> According to the Punjab Tenancy Act, 1878, “those living on a particular land for

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Mubbashir Rizvi, ‘From Terrorism to Dispossession: Pakistan’s Anti-Terrorism Act as a Means of Eviction’ (2018) 34 (3) *Anthropolgy Today* 16.

generations have the first right over it.”<sup>22</sup> It was under this phenomenon and law that the AMP strove for ownership of the land they had lived on and worked over for centuries. The crucial demand and agenda of the peasants under the umbrella of land ownership gave rise to a slogan *Malkiat ya Maut* which became synonymous with ‘get ownership or die’ and the dire need and understanding of backing the struggle with a legal basis was what helped the struggle mobilize so effectively.<sup>23</sup>

The idea of tenancy being overthrown by the military led to new contracts being made and forcefully being signed by peasants under the colour of defense and security of the state. The new contracts led to the title of the peasants change from tenants to lessees whose rights on the lands they had tilled for years had changed. The conditions were extremely harsh and demanded that the lessees were not allowed to “chop or trim a single tree without the written permission of the Military Farm Management [and] only the Farm authorities could decide which crops to sow, while the lessee would pay the *abiana* (water charges) as well as taxes.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, some of the more severe conditions included the absence of a possibility to gain ownership of the land they were working on. Those who did not have agricultural responsibilities over a land could not hold residential land, farmers contracted could never possibly demand ownership of land, and the lessee had to pay a ten percent increase annually, with the administration being rooted to power to dismiss all contractual obligations at its own discretion and not giving contractors a chance to participate in political activities as a matter of right.<sup>25</sup> The mandate which allowed the Okara tenants to be quick in challenging the military takeover on the issue of land ownership stemmed from the large majority of AMP being Christian and wholesomely understanding the support of the Church during the British era in settling Christian matters over their land and verifying that the land was technically owned by the government of

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<sup>22</sup> Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, *This Land is Our Land: Peasants in Okara fight for their rights* (*Newsline Magazine*, June 2016) <<https://newslinemagazine.com/magazine/land-land-peasants-okara-fight-rights/>> accessed 13 May 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Farida Shaheed, ‘The Women’s Movement in Pakistan: Challenges and Achievements’ in Amrita Basu (eds) *Women’s Movement in the Global Era* (Westview Press 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Rubina Saigol, *Ownership or Death: Women and Tenant struggles in Pakistan Punjab* (Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace (Wiscomp) 2004) 24.

<sup>25</sup> Azra Talat Sayeed and Wali Haider, ‘Anjuman-e-Mazareen Punjab: Ownership or Death – The Struggle Continues’ in Aziz Choudhry and Dip Kapoor (eds), *Learning from the Group Up: Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010) 216.

Punjab. Further research also allowed the AMP leadership to observe the lack of dues paid to the provincial government by the Farm Management that was responsible for the payment of revenue to those whom the land actually belonged.<sup>26</sup> The movement took to slogans that further furnished its agenda into what we now call the struggle for food sovereignty. The demand was chanted in the following words: “*jera wahway ohe khawae*” meaning “those who sow the seeds shall reap the harvest.”

However, the fortunate and obvious mission of the peasant’s movement in Okara comes with the powerful position that men and especially women in Okara Military Farms have fought with at the forefront. Vital to the movement were some men such as Mr. Asim Sajjad, a representative of people’s rights movements, and Anwar Javed Dogar, the first President of AMP, both of whom raised their voices in favour of the peasant struggle in Okara by referring to the historical narrative of the situation where farmers from colonial time settled in the districts of Okara and Khanewal with the promise that “they would be given proprietary land rights”<sup>27</sup> over the land which they now have tilled for decades. Still what captures our attention is, more importantly, the role that the Pakistani women played in the struggle to achieve what was rightfully theirs as they became evident in the AMP leadership and movement. Along with Susan Bibi, Mariam Bibi, Munawar Bibi, the AMP movement was highly fortunate to have young and unmarried women at the frontlines fighting against one of the most powerful state institutions – the military.<sup>28</sup> Women stood headstrong between their lands and the resistive forces of the police and the Farm management. It was difficult to remain determined in times when there were threats that they might lose their lives in struggle for land rights. However, women remained more involved than men in this movement and could be said to have protected their men from gruesome unbearable circumstances where they could have been harshly beaten and killed had the former not stood as a barrier to avoid this bloodshed. Women’s involvement in the efforts to claim their land back were fundamental and indispensable in a successful attempt to wage confrontation with the militant activism.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 216.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmad Salim, Peasant Land Rights Movements of Pakistan, (*Sustainable Development Policy Institute*, 2008), 66  
<[https://sdpi.org/research\\_programme/Files/wlr\\_Peasants%20Land%20Rights\\_final.pdf](https://sdpi.org/research_programme/Files/wlr_Peasants%20Land%20Rights_final.pdf)>  
accessed 14 May 2019.

<sup>28</sup> (n 20), 220.

Even though the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) has almost settled the Okara Military Farms dispute last year in 2019, it has advised the tenants to pay the *battai* as agreed during the negotiations and the Military Farms to refrain from any harassment or physical torture of the farmer community. The joint efforts of the Chief Representative of AMP and the Commandant Military Farms Okara led to a peace agreement being negotiated and signed by the two parties, which did not declare tenants as the owners of the property they had lived and worked on for years. However, they were in fact instructed by the Commission to further take up the claim of ownership with the Board of Revenue, Government of Punjab, because the NCHR was of the opinion that the tenants cannot withhold *battai* as long as the fact that the land is vested in the Government on Punjab is accepted by the military farms and so long as the provincial government accepts the payment of *battai* to the military farms.<sup>29</sup> NCHR Chairman Justice (R) Ali Nawaz Chohan also stated in the hearing that the army had acknowledged that the land belonged to the Government of Punjab, but claimed that the military as an institution has possessed and exercised control over these farms which produced fodder for their cattle and horses. As a result, out of the total yield produced, 50 percent of the share will be given to the military or the government.<sup>30</sup>

It is also crucial to note that the dialogue and conversation resorted to by AMP was recognised by La Via Campesina when it became allied with the Kisaan Rabita Committee Pakistan. Struggle deployed a class action where their solidarity and hope were “supported by civil society [actors], human rights defenders, national human rights institutions, trade unions”<sup>31</sup> and other famous lawyers such as Asma Jehangir. The most intrinsic part of the struggle stems from the fact that to date, despite factions existing within the AMP, their aim and call for food sovereignty only rings a bell for ownership and land rights which allows for eradicating the long haul of hunger and bearing

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<sup>29</sup> Myra Imran, ‘Okara Military Farms dispute settled’ *The News International* (Islamabad, 29 March 2019) <<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/450163-okara-military-farms-dispute-settled>> accessed 03 May 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Faizan Ali Warraich, ‘Okara Military Farms dispute ‘almost settled’: NCHR’ *The Nation* (Lahore, 4 January 2019) <<https://nation.com.pk/04-Jan-2019/okara-military-farms-dispute-almost-settled-nchr>> accessed 03 May 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Harvest of Hope| ‘The struggles of tenant farmers in Okara Military Farms, Pakistan’ (La Via Campesina, 15 June 2018) <<https://viacampesina.org/en/harvest-of-hope-the-struggles-of-tenant-farmers-in-okara-military-farms-pakistan/>> accessed 17 May 2019.

the fruit of the seed they sowed themselves. This does not only ensure the shift to food sovereignty, but a more food secure environment that one lives for and in.

Despite a significant impact that the struggle had on the recognition of land rights and claim over ownership of agricultural produce, with the lack of AMP's strategic linkages with external political influences, it can be observed that their presence could have otherwise ensured greater protection of the peasants' land rights. If they are next challenged by feudal or corporate control with an attempt to take over the natural resources and land for their own business models, the farmers and peasants will be in a better and stronger position to defend what they grow to their own benefit.

### **Pakistan Kissan Movement Tehreek**

The role of other peasant and farmer groups and organisations also needs to be highlighted in order to understand the struggle deployed for land rights in their agricultural base. The Pakistan Kissan Movement Tehreek (PKMT)<sup>32</sup> “a mass-based alliance of small and landless farmers including women farmers”<sup>33</sup> was formed in 2008 as a result of discussions amongst farmers and social and political activists who felt a dire need to establish a platform for voicing concerns of the landless and addressing their socio-economic constraints. One of the key objectives of PKMT is just and equitable land distribution and the same is evident by their countless protests and struggles which have borne fruit.<sup>34</sup> The two main ideologies that every PKMT advocate of fair and equitable distribution of agricultural land and food security<sup>35</sup> purports deviation from, are: capitalism and feudalism. The former pushes multinational companies and transnational corporations into free trade, minimalizes state intervention, and in effect diminishes the role of the State when foreign investors from outside try to invest in local markets in the name

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<sup>32</sup> Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek is spread across 16 districts in three provinces: Khyber Pakhtunwa, Punjab, and Sindh.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Pakistan Kissan Mazdoor Tehreek: Assert Our Right to Food Sovereignty, Roots for Equity’ <<https://pkmt.noblogs.org/about-pkmt/>> accessed 15 May 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Food security, according to the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, is defined as “that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.”

of and under the garb of globalization, hence weakening the borders that once used to govern us with so-called sovereignty. The latter, however, allows for land to remain accumulated in the hands of the wealthy feudal lords and *jaagirdars* rather than be allocated equitably.

On June 13, 2014, a media sensitization workshop organised by PKMT which elaborated upon the growing food insecurity in Pakistan, created awareness on the rising demand for “equal distribution of agricultural land and irrigational water among small growers, chiefly landless people, through effective land reforms in the country”.<sup>36</sup> One of the main grievances put forth by the social organisers of the workshop was the need to deal with the issue of hunger being faced by the population living below poverty line. This indicated that there is a marked trend of the struggle for land redistribution, encompassing within it, a language for food rights. Statistics from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and official figures from credible reports were quoted in order to gauge further support. Consequently, engagement was observed in a campaign that promoted not only a just redistributive stance, but one that aimed to reduce the “tightened control of multinational companies”<sup>37</sup> on manufacture and production of food through their exclusively prepared seeds and crops.

Five years later, the demands articulated by PKMT are a little more inclined towards ending the excessive involvement of the role of the “international corporate sector in agriculture”<sup>38</sup> and suspending the escalated dispensation of land to transnational corporations.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of PKMT, which at its birth focused on the voice of small and landless farmers, has expanded in mandate to now being one of the stronger proponents of food sovereignty in 2019. A website dedicated to PKMT has remarked and vocalized the organised framework they are part of to bring social and economic change, and believe that their movement is “the most powerful

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<sup>36</sup> Ali Hazrat Bacha, ‘Equitable Distribution of Agriculture Land, Water Stressed’ (*Dawn*, 14 June 2014) <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1112681>> accessed 15 May 2019.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Bureau Report, ‘Panelists call for ending role of corporate sector in agriculture’ (*Dawn*, 30 March 2019) <[https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=30\\_03\\_2019\\_182\\_002](https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=30_03_2019_182_002)> accessed 17 May 2019.

<sup>39</sup> At an event organized by PKMT on the International Day of the Landless Farmers, PKMT was seen working with an NGO called Roots for Equity, Asian Peasant Coalition, Pesticide Action Network, Asia Pacific and International Women’s Alliance.

collective response by small producers in rebutting the impacts of free trade and a cohesive alternate to globalisation.”<sup>40</sup> At a seminar held in Peshawar on March 29, 2019, the struggle of the landless farmers for fair land reforms and food sovereignty was heightened. One of the demands made included the control over land they had been tilling for generations with their ancestors, but were evicted from due to developmental projects across the country such as the exclusive economic zones that were leased to investors.<sup>41</sup> PKMT’s National Coordinator and General Secretary both have protested against the prevalent imperialist corporate agriculture which is supported by institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organization (WTO) in rich capitalist countries, but in effect deprives Pakistani farmers of means of control over production and markets.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunate as it is, the poor Pakistani farmer and landless peasant is subjected to land grab which consolidates land deals for food production, production of agro-fuel, and acquisitions such as China’s One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.

The rhetoric which advocates of land redistribution extend is not limited to the land they have associated themselves with for years. While one can argue that there is identity politics or a massive need for recognition involved in terms of land rights, it can be observed that the struggle which was segmented into parts and politics is now coming together as a complete picture due to the changing circumstances and revitalizing socio-economic context. This contextualizes with Upendra Baxi’s piece on the paradigm shift. Even though according to him, the “emergent paradigm shift insists upon the promotion and the protection of the collective human rights of global capital, in ways which ‘justify’ corporate well-being and dignity when it entails continuing gross and flagrant violation of human rights of actually existing human beings and communities,”<sup>43</sup> our use of the term ‘shift’ is a positive, pragmatic and beneficial one. It is true that in the instant case, the language which our state speaks is one assisting and facilitating the corporate food regime, and it also aims to inculcate a sense of security for transnational corporations intervening in its territory. However, with liberalization of the trade and the open-market, the State has failed to put human rights of the self on the same pedestal or treat them with the same priority and regard. Hence, for Baxi, the end of the farmer is known as an endology (end to every

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<sup>40</sup> (n 7).

<sup>41</sup> (n 12).

<sup>42</sup> Reference to Haris Gazdar’s Fourth Round.

<sup>43</sup> Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights* (OUP 2006) 234.

alternative to capitalism) explained in the following words: “facilitated by new forms of total multinational enterprise control over world food production.”<sup>44</sup> While proponents of food sovereignty would otherwise suggest an end to capitalism when transnational corporations interfere with agrarian models, the paradigm shift practically refers to a transition from the struggle for land rights to a renegotiation of food security and a recognition of food sovereignty in Pakistan.

### **The Essence of La Via Campesina**

To capture the essence of the movement, the struggles of La Via Campesina must be regarded as the key to understand whether there is a transition or paradigm shift from a need for land rights solely to a need for food sovereignty after the struggle for food security has been internalised by those that began a journey of food crisis at the brink of losing their lands.

In the case of Okara Military Farms, a majority had been deprived of their land by the military, and desired to achieve land ownership amidst this deprivation, in order to have a livelihood, a means of contribution to an agrarian economy, and a vast agricultural produce for their survival, for a sustainable growth. However, on the other hand, those involved in the struggle propagated by PKMT have asked for suspending the intervention of numerous multinational enterprises and transnational sectors who take over and grab lands for controlling food production. An assertion of equitable and fair distribution of land along with a right to produce, manufacture and sell their yields and produce is the new demand of those growing the harvest. The language and struggle of exclusive and total ownership is what translates into their right to food sovereignty because their fight, even though differently designed than that of AMP, is what perpetuates the promise of possession and development for them in their agrarian diaspora. The two born out of completely different socio-economic backgrounds and historical contexts still call for reoriented land ownership, but in a manner so as to exercise their right over their produce to the extent of being an integral part of the agrarian system that food sovereignty governs. The historical struggles discussed above are enshrined in the internal and external dimensions governing the idea of food sovereignty that cannot be disregarded. While the internal dimension of AMP and PKMT empower farmers and peasants to recognize their basic

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 244.

fundamental human rights to choose their own political, economic and social system and govern the realm of food production and trade, the external dimension involves understanding the perspective of the State, even if it is the military take-over. The sovereignty accorded to a state is seen as the protection afforded to it. The two dimensions conflict, but the latter ensures the ability and capacity of the state to intervene in peasants' rights and develop agricultural systems which are more compatible with the state's narrative without taking into account the impact and effect it has on the poor and landless whose produce is eventually owned, distributed and benefitted by institutions, markets and corporations to any extent possible.

La Via Campesina stood up for the slogan that "*Peasant Rights are Human Rights,*" and mobilised in form to bring together an international legal instrument: The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).<sup>45</sup> The crux of UNDROP lies in the role served by peasants and small farmers and the idea that they not only ensure food security but also food sovereignty. One of the biggest contributions of this declaration is not limited to reducing malnutrition or poverty but is also to better rural development and create employment opportunities for men and women in the rural sector, so that the people who produce food are the ones managing its accessibility and availability in the market, hence improving standards of living and equality within communities.

To further elaborate upon the paradigm shift that this article argues, the fabric of the struggles La Via Campesina has been occupied in plays an important role. Peasant campaigns at grassroots, land ownership by farmers, violations by transnational corporations of peasants' rights, promoting agro-ecology and defending local seeds, working towards biodiversity and small scale sustainable production which benefits the communities and their environment are some of the fundamental priorities that La Via Campesina has struggled for since its emergence.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Finally, UN General Assembly adopts Peasant Rights Declaration! Now focus is on its implementation (La Via Campesina, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2018) <<https://viacampesina.org/en/finally-un-general-assembly-adopts-peasant-rights-declaration-now-focus-is-on-its-implementation/>> accessed 16 May 2019.

<sup>46</sup> La Via Campesina: The International Peasant's Voice, Globalizing hope, globalizing the struggle! <<https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/>> accessed 18 May 2019.

## **The Critique of Food Sovereignty**

While the food sovereignty movement has allowed for recognition of new rights for peasants, it has also been subjected to three main dangers of institutionalisation which hinder its development in the future.<sup>47</sup> Firstly, the human rights framework is heavily linked to complex and developed legal frameworks and institutions, hence, a human rights change which usually comes from a top-down approach might not be able to encompass within it a (bottom-up) campaign that mobilizes in the grassroots. Secondly, if average farmers, peasants and citizens are struggling to deploy human rights, a certain level of expertise might not be met which is often portrayed in the vocabulary and tactics used by human rights lawyers and defenders. Consequently, issues that arise in the rubric of human rights are more often than not carefully drafted and crafted in the international arena so as to frame their problem in a specialized way. Thirdly, human rights claims demand their codification in law due to the way they have been built, however, institutionalizing human rights claims might result in undermining or subverting the human rights discourse itself.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, due to a number of threats to the grass-root level and marginalized community struggles, an institution is harboured to inculcate and propagate a fear among those who fight for their rights – a fear that their voice might be subdued or their rights might never be recognized in essence of the violations they are a victim of.

Moreover, the struggle towards food sovereignty is also susceptible to the kinds of challenges and issues this right and movement can face in its emergence, or at a later stage of development. Food sovereignty is a concept prevalent in many regimes and regions. However, the notion of protecting and safeguarding one's interest in the food they are growing is subject to ideas of where and how the food is traded and the distance it covers from the farm to the mouth. While smallholders and farm workers are at an added advantage of covering shorter farmland distances that require frequent travel within their regions as compared to the lack of access of corporate agro-food organizations to farms, the former is less likely to affect our climate and add to the untenable and inevitable global warming. In light of the urgent need to reduce emissions of the greenhouse gases (GHG), it is pertinent to note that those

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Priscilla Claeys, 'The Creation of New Rights by the Food Sovereignty Movement: The Challenge of Institutionalizing Subversion' (2012) 46 (5) *Sociology* 844-860.

markets and trans- and multinational corporations involved in industrialised agriculture produce much greater yields and food which in and of itself leads to a larger carbon footprint. However, their large machinery, fertilizers, pesticides, deforestation and intensive livestock operations ensure extreme specialised landscapes and allows large land farmers to frequently travel long distances with both the agricultural inputs and outputs, something not promised by small farms that tend to cover shorter distances for the transportation of food. Due to lack of specialised transporting mechanism and inherently fewer food miles that the small farmers cover, the labour-intensive and biodiverse farming mitigates climate change, but is still dependent on other corporate organisations and businesses to transport their unique and differently grown crops to the larger global markets at farther away distances. Hence, proponents of the industrialized corporate food sector advocate for intervention of market and corporations within the peasants' agricultural framework which distorts the very image of and need for food sovereignty and rather propose a more feasible channel for globalisation to hand over the means of production and trade to the corporate world.

Furthermore, food sovereignty with respect to trade and distance, cannot neglect the “extent to which non-local dietary preferences can or should be challenged.”<sup>49</sup> Food cultures have historically been based on a particular place or territory and “tied to agricultural capabilities in a given region,”<sup>50</sup> hence, advocates of food sovereignty should not neglect the fact that some distance needs to be covered without fixating on rigid borders and boundaries to separate what is ‘culturally appropriate’ and might be permissible within a food sovereignty paradigm from what is not.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, to answer the same argument, food sovereignty should be able to see the comparison between necessity or nutritional value versus luxury. An example to illustrate this concept can be that of a fair-trade coffee, as opposed to Coca-Cola manufactured in the industry. The difference between both might not be easily visible unless the extent to which trade and distance can be justified with regards to policy and practice. The coffee (nutritional value) which might be fairly traded, might not be bought and sold that often and be less in demand as compared to Coca-Cola (luxury) which seems to be the

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<sup>49</sup> Marc Edelman, Tony Weis, Amita Baviskar, Saturnino M. Borras Jr, Eric Holt-Gimenez, Deniz Kandiyoti and Wendy Wolford, ‘Introduction: Critical Perspectives on Food Sovereignty’ (2014) 41 (6) *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 911-931, 916.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

need and necessity of a particular culture based on their food preferences.<sup>52</sup> After all, it depends on the kind of culture and group of people a particular crop, food, and product is being traded to. Coffee that might be cheaper and manufactured locally may not be preferred over a carbonated soft drink imported from a farther away and inescapable distance, which was produced non-locally and is better suited to the taste buds of a certain geographic location.

Similarly, the criticism to multilateral governance in food sovereignty and its power dynamics in the corporate sector has failed to realise full-fledged details on the place of trade and distance. It has in turn indicated its incapacity to provide local farmers and peasants with institutions which are required to develop secure, more equitable, stable and democratic positions with trading networks around the world such as the WTO. Farmers and small-scale producers instead of focusing on slogans such as “WTO Out of Agriculture”, must rather try to strike a balance in its approach towards a healthy yet equal stance that benefit cooperation between the two actors. “Changes in the existing rules might contribute to a broader food-sovereignty-based trade campaign.”<sup>53</sup> Hence, it is believable that food security and sovereignty can be aligned on the same plain and platform, if transnational corporations do not impeach upon the territorial boundaries of farmers, and if our state limits but does not entirely terminate the intervention by the corporate sector, in order for farmers to work in collaboration with the transnational food system.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it must be stated that there is in fact a paradigm shift to-be-observed from a need and struggle for land redistribution and reform to a need and struggle for food sovereignty in Pakistan. While Pakistan has not yet achieved this shift and peasants still struggle for their human rights, it is safe to say that our state currently is in one of its transitional phases where if farmers from all over Pakistan continue to remain mobilised and active, their demands of right to land will soon be fulfilling their right to food sovereignty. Peasants, tenants and farmers who have got their land back as a result of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Also see, Kim Burnett and Sophia Murphy, ‘What place for international trade in food sovereignty?’ (2014) 41 (6) *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1065–84.

protests and struggles deployed (be it through the works of AMP or PKMT, or any other group, organisation, and coalition) will be seen in light of enjoying their human rights under the larger umbrella of the International Peasants' Movement, La Via Campesina. The transition in the case study of PKMT is visible more so than in Okara Military Farms, and the reason for this can be assumed to be that the latter's struggle mainly constitutes the ownership or tenancy of the land which they wish to achieve again, while the former wishes to further have control over the food they produce and should trade on the land they already own. In light of the AMP struggle, it can be said that their agriculture and livelihood (food production and market) has been greatly affected as a result of the military's actions. Hence, even though the potential paradigm shift is proving to be fruitful as it empowered the poor and the landless, it is imperative to measure the possible pros of food sovereignty against the likely cons, and vouch for improvements and innovations that the food sovereignty discourse requires and must advance in.