

“Feudal Power Dynamics in Punjab, Historical Legacies, Socio Economic Impacts and Contemporary Challenges”

Dr. AHTASHAM JAN BUTT

Assistant Professor Higher Education Department.

Email: ahatishamjanbutt12@gmail.com

MS. SAIRA ZAKA

MPHIL research Scholar at University of Okara

Email: zsaira101@gmail.com

SHAH JAHAN AHMAD

Visiting faculty Sociology department university of Okara, Pakistan

Email: sjahmad.ch@gmail.com

Abstract:

This study delves into the intricate power dynamics shaped by feudalism in Punjab, examining historical legacies, socio-economic impacts, and contemporary challenges. Historically, feudal structures in Punjab were established during colonial times, reinforcing hierarchical landownership and socio-political dominance of elite families. These legacies continue to influence the region's socio-economic landscape, where vast landholdings are concentrated among a few, perpetuating economic disparities and social stratification. The socio-economic impacts are profound, affecting agricultural productivity, rural poverty, and access to education and healthcare. Contemporary challenges include addressing these entrenched inequalities, fostering rural development, and promoting equitable land reforms. The study also explores the political influence of feudal lords, which hinders democratic processes and policy implementation aimed at social justice. Through a comprehensive analysis, this research underscores the need for structural reforms to dismantle feudal legacies and promote inclusive socio-economic growth in Punjab.

Keyword: Feudalism, History, Power Dynamics

Introduction

Feudalism is a socio-economic and political system where the land ownership and property are primarily held by the group of few. The feudal lords are blessed with the support of the king and nobles. In return they offer their services to the kings and nobles. They promise to the king to support in all even and odds either it is matters of economy of military support.

The feudalism has a long historical roots but in the perspective of Subcontinent, the roots of the feudalism are traced back to the Mughal Empire and the other invaders who aligned the local lords with them to achieve socio-political objectives. There were more than five hundred independent states at the time of partition which is the proof of feudalism in subcontinent.

After partition, both India and Pakistan opted their ways in the social and political spheres. India soon overcome the feudalism by introducing the lands reforms. The land reforms are the basic

solution of end of feudalism because a landlord holds thousands of the acres land. All of the peasants and workers who work in their lands are bound to the order of the lands lords. They can run them according to their own (Appu, 1996).

Feudalism is still at the peak in the South Punjab where a few landlords are holding monopoly over the social and economic resources. All these landlords have relations with bureaucracy and military. They are members of the national and provincial assemblies where they make legislations of the country. Being a landlord, they make such legislations which serve their interests not the public at large. This is the reasons that feudalism is hinder social and economic progress in Pakistan.

This research is an effort to highlight the historical traces of feudalism in Pakistan with special focus on the Punjab. Punjab is the largest province of Pakistan in the terms of population. Being the prominent province of Pakistan, Punjab is still facing the issue of feudalism. Due to feudalism, the socio-economic progress of the country is adversely affected. This research paper is intended to disclose the issue of feudalism. It is also aimed at exploring the challenges triggered by feudalism in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

Although Pakistan is restoring the democratic process which was initiated by Quaid-e-Azam, yet the prevalence of the feudalism in Punjab is still a question mark to the democratic institution in Pakistan. The existence of feudalism is still a matter of concern which should be tackled properly. The feudalism in Punjab is perpetuating socio-economic inequalities, hindering the economic and educational growth, and other infrastructural developments. The presence of feudalism with historical legacies in Punjab is shaping the socio-political life of this province. All of the policies and laws are enacted through these feudal because they are the legislators, bureaucrats and policy makers. The feudalism has concentrated the land ownership and provide limited opportunities to the public at large to take their own initiatives for socio-economic matters. In the light of the above explanation, this research aims to explore the historical legacies, socio-economic impacts and contemporary challenges to feudalism in Punjab.

Significance of the Study

The contemporary world is heading towards modern and post-modern stages but Pakistan is still far behind. The traditional social and political practices depict that Pakistan still has to work a lot to move ahead in order to compete the rest of the world. In this regard, the current research has much significance as it tries to root out the cause of the persistency of feudalism in Punjab. It will also explore the historical aspects of feudalism in Punjab. This research is also significant for policy developments by examining the causes of feudalism in hindering socio-economic developments. This study also explores the root cause of poverty and social inequality in the province of Punjab. This study adds in the existing body of knowledge about the feudalism, its roots and impacts. This study has significance in the regard of identifying the contemporary challenges posed feudalism. So, overall, the current research is enriched with comprehensive understanding of feudal powers dynamics, its historical legacies and contemporary challenges with special focus of Punjab.

Methodology

The researcher intended to explore the feudal power dynamics, historical legacies and socio-economic impacts of feudalism with contemporary challenges which is an important topic in relation to Punjab. The current study is purely qualitative in nature in which the researcher adopted descriptive and exploratory research designs. The descriptive research explained the phenomenon of feudalism in details while through exploratory research design, the socio-economic impacts and contemporary challenges of feudalism are addressed. The present has been conducted only on the secondary data. Secondary data was collected from the existing sources including books, research articles, research reports, official records, newspapers and other online sources. The data was analyzed by using key themes categorized under the broader topics in line with the objectives of the study.

History of Feudalism in Punjab

Before the advancement of democracy, the administration of this region now known as Punjab was based on feudalism. The democratic system played a role in reshaping the socio-political and economic dynamics of this region but the feudalism cannot be tackled properly. The practice of feudalistic system is still in practice at large. This section deals with the historical traces of feudalism in Punjab which had been in practice since centuries. Feudalism in the region has passed through following different eras.

Early Feudalism

The region of Punjab had been ruled by the different ruling dynasties and empires. The early period of feudalism in this region was laid down by the Hindu kings and rajas during Gupta and Maurya empires. They firstly laid down the bases of feudalism in this territory which was later enhanced by the next ruling dynasties. In this period, the major objective of feudalism was to gain military support from the local feudal lords who were given the rights over vast lands. The local rulers, nobles and military elites were the prominent figures who held the power of local feudalism during the early period of feudalism.

Mughal Period

The Mughal period ruled in subcontinent roughly from 16th to 18th centuries and established a large empire in this region. This period further prospered the feudalism in Punjab by granting more socio-political and administrative rights. Like the early feudalism, this phase of feudalism was also dominant by military support but it also focused on the revenue collection and to enhance the revenue of the empire through local feudal lords. The Mughal emperor granted vast jagirs to their loyal local rajas in return of their military support. With the passage of time, their jagirs continued to be vast and they became feudal lords in their states through controlling such huge area of lands and by exercising their authority over the masses (Hintze, 1997).

Sikh Rule

After the end of the Mughal empire, the Sikh empire was established in Punjab in 18th century under the leadership of Sikh emperor Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This rule promoted Sikhism which expanded till the boundaries of contemporary Afghanistan. Like the previous rules, the Sikh empire also promoted feudalism and relied on gaining military and economic support from these

local rajas and nawabs. Mughal era had already prepared a solid form of feudalism so maharaja Ranjit Singh adopted the same system and used to expand his reign and state. The feudalism under this era was also based on nobles, sardars, and military commanders (Alam, 1986).

British Era

The British came in this region for the economic purpose during the Mughal empire. Over their long stay at subcontinent, they realized the worth of subcontinent because during Mughal era, this region had almost $\frac{1}{4}$ share of total GDP of the world. Over the period of time they also came to know about the weaknesses of this system and took over the control of this terrorist in the middle of 19th century (Habib, 1969). After assuming the control of Punjab, they further empowered feudalism to gain their loyalties and sympathies. The feudalism was further transformed into the colonial interests. They introduced much consolidated system known as Zamindari system which granted the ownership rights to the landlords. This further empowered the feudalism as they became legitimate owners of these lands. This adversely affected the peasants which were reduced to mere tenant famers with economic dependence of these landlords.

Post-Independence Period

During the independence movement, such feudal lords were in the unionist party and had soft corners for the British rule. They were against the popularity of Muslim League in Punjab. The landlords were also in the side by side of Muslim League and some of them did not claim their land share in Pakistan because they were loyal to the newly established state. Soon after the demise of core leadership, Muslim League was also dominated by these feudal lords who later got full space under the martial law period of Ayyub Khan. Ayyub Khan introduced basic democracies system which created a new class of politicians consisting of these land lords in the Punjab. Ayyub Khan also introduced land reforms to address the issue of feudalism but it could not be proved successful due to strong influence of the landlords in the cabinet (Farani, 2005).

Feudal Power Dynamics in Punjab

Feudalism is prevailed in Punjab especially in the south Punjab. The feudal approach is dominant over the whole province but the urban areas have less intensity of the same due to educational awareness of the community. Despite, educational and legal awareness, the prominent families especially the political families dominate the respective areas. They cannot be challenged due to their dominant role over the society. Even in such urban areas, they are managing the political, economic and social resources. But when it comes to the backward areas of Punjab, the jaws of feudalism are very tightened and consolidated. They are all in all in the running social, political and economic matters by their own. They are enjoying full-fledge authority in these areas. Their power dynamics don't have limits. Following are some of the prominent features of feudal power dynamic in Punjab (Ahmed, 1972).

Land Ownership

Land ownership is the most prominent feature of feudal power dynamic in Punjab. This is the actual base of the feudal lords to enjoy their superior role over the majority of the population. In a particular region, there is single or a few families that hold hundreds and thousands acres of land which make them dominant over the masses living in the same areas. For example, the south

Punjab is dominated by the few families prominently including Qureshi, Gilani, Khar, Makhdoom, Laghari, Mazari and Khosa etc. The majority of the lands of Southern Punjab are held by these families. Their areas roughly start from Multan and extend up till the boundaries of Sindh and Baluchistan.

The own the agricultural and industrial fields of economic resources in these areas. These are two prominent sources of income of the masses. They have to obey their orders, directions in order to earn money run their family system. The situation becomes worse as you move from Multan towards DG Khan and Rajanpur. The poor is in such condition that he/she cannot even meet the basic needs of life and the riches don't have limits of their economic resources.

Not only the south but the whole Punjab is dominated by the feudal lords. In the other parts of Punjab, the feudal lords exist in the form of dominant families i.e., Laliaka, Maneka, Watoo, Chaudhary, Doltana, and Sharif etc. All of these families have historical legacies of feudal outlook in the central Punjab and own vast areas of lands. They are now more relying on the industrial setups that agricultural. But the ultimate objective of all these families is to maintain their dominance over the rest of the population due to their agricultural and industrial resources.

Political Influence

Another power dynamic of the feudal families is to hold political influence. They have political involvements which again has historical legacies. The above-mentioned families are not born suddenly rather their forefathers had been in political powers since centuries. The historical legacies of these families are connected with rules of kings prior to the induction of democratic method. They had been in power since the common people don't had power to participate into the political matters. Hence they have historical political influence in the respective areas since centuries.

Political influence and land ownership are interlinked with each other. They remain in power during every era either in the form of political or bureaucratic power. In the contemporary politics, the representatives of the feudal families are the members of national and provincial assemblies. They participate into the politics to enjoy the overwhelming control over the population. The feudal power is informal but the political powers grant them legitimacy of their power which they use as a tool to further curb the power of people.

Now third and even the fourth generations of these families are in political power. They are educated from the international universities but education and their socialization trained them to rule over the masses. Being the representatives of national and provincial politics, they trigger the economic and welfare resources according to their directions which again exploit the public at large. Hence the amalgamation of feudal and political power makes them more powerful which encourages the practices of feudalism in the modern period as well.

Social Hierarchy

Another power dynamic of a feudal society is to maintain a rigid form of social hierarchy. In such society if you are born in a poor family of a tenant, you are supposed to be uneducated, untouchable, ignorant, poorer and tenants like your forefathers. The rigid form of social hierarchy is as old as the feudalism itself. There are examples that families are serving the same feudal family

since centuries. They are not even allowed to send their children to schools because neither they have resources nor they are allowed (Fuller, 1989).

The maintenance of social hierarchy is the primary condition of the feudalism. It maintains distance between the serfs and the lords. Because if they get involved and amalgamated with common people, they will lose their control over the society.

In the rigid social hierarchy, feudal lords are ranked at the top. They have absolute power to direct the subordinate for particular action. They hold the resources of society prominently agricultural which is the primary source of income. Beneath the feudal lords, farmers, tenants and laborers are ranked. These are the worker which work in the lands of the feudal lords and get their minimal share at the end of the season. Through these shares they hardly manage their needs.

This rigid form of social hierarchy is largely based on the exploitation and injustice against the lower ranks. Through this hierarchal system, the feudal lords perpetuate their dominance over the common people. They coerce them to abide the conditions and if anyone violates, more severe conditions are imposed on him/her. The chances of social mobility are very limited in such rigid social hierarchy because neither they get education nor they revolt against their feudal lords.

Dependency of Subordinates

Dependency of the subordinates i.e., peasants and laborers in another dynamic of feudal power in Punjab. A society where there are fewer economic opportunities available for the people will automatically make the people subordinate to the feudal system. The peasants including all of their family members work in the fields in order to get some extra money but it is not a legal or formal authority where clear cut conditions are defined rather it is somewhat like kings' rule where they have absolute powers to define and modify the rule of share.

In the perspective of Punjab, the feudalism has highly made the people dependent on them. There are basically agricultural sources of income so while knowing the availability of fewer sources of income, the feudal lords perpetuate the dependency of the masses. They control the economic resources wholly so they set the terms and conditions according to their wishes and manipulate the same whenever they wish. Being the sole source of income, the people continue their employability under tough conditions as well. This makes them dependent solely on such local lords. This is a circle based on exploitation which rounds about the feudalism (Ahmed, 1972).

Influencing Authorities

Influencing the local legal authorities is another dynamic which shows the extreme powers of the feudalism. The feudal lords hold their influence over all of the legal authorities which are posted through the direction of the state. They are actually state because the system of state is run through these authorities including police, local administration and judiciary. The police culture is much prominent in these areas because the feudal representatives use these forces to get the revenge from their opponents.

They are all aware about those who are in their favor during elections. Firstly, they coerce them to get their votes but yet if they don't agree, they adopt the Thana culture to lodge fake FIRs against

them which they cannot bear due to scarcity of resources. The police system works according to their directions that whom they have to arrest and whom don't.

Apart from mere police, they are dominating over the decisions of the local administration for infrastructural and social developments. They direct them to make infrastructural developments in those areas where they have their voters and totally neglect the areas which belongs to the opposite party which is again headed by another local lord.

The judicial system is more powerful than the above-mentioned spheres but it is again not out of the influence of the feudalism. They are pressurizing the judges to get their desired verdicts. On a whole, it is found that feudalism in Punjab is enjoying overwhelming power in social, political and economic domains. They hold all of these resources and exploit the masses while maintaining rigid from of social hierarchy.

Conclusion

This research paper was intended to explore the feudal power dynamics in Punjab. It shed light on the feudal powers with focusing on their historical legacies, socio-economic impacts and the contemporary challenges. The research is based on the extensive data collection found that feudalism had deep historical roots in Punjab which can be traced back to the period of before Christ i.e. Gupta Empire (D'souza, 2002). Throughout the history of Punjab, the feudal lords had been occupying the socio-economic and political heads of power. Being the landlords, they maintained monopoly over the rural and backward areas. they held vast lands which is the main source of income in such areas. due to the dominating attributes, the feudal lords perpetuated socio-economic inequalities, limiting the educational and healthcare opportunities and marginalized the communities.

After the inception of Pakistan, there have been made many efforts to end the feudalistic dominance in Punjab. Ayyub Khan and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto introduced land reforms to end the socio-economic monopoly of the landlords and to provide equitable lands to the peasants. They both failed to do so due to highly influential outlook of the feudal lords in politics and bureaucracy. The political resistance, inadequate implementation and bureaucratic inefficiencies were a few determinants which failed the land reforms in Punjab.

It requires concrete and multifaceted approach to curtail prevailing feudalism in Punjab. Feudalism can only be tackled if the peasants and farmers and other community members of such areas are educated. Education is another powerful tool after land reforms which can pull public pressure against the feudal dominance. The awareness programs should be initiated to change the typical mindset of the community members. This can only be possible advocating comprehensive lands reform policies, empowering the communities through governmental investments, and strengthening the legal framework. The local administration should also be empowered especially the judiciary to take on the unbiased decisions against the criminalities of the feudal lords.

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