CHAPTER IV

LAND REFORMS AND ITS ROLE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT
To some it may have seemed that the first step towards land reform could be most easily achieved through a distribution of state land to peasants. Malkam Khan (1908), one of the early advocates of constitutional reform, first proposed this in an essay several years earlier. The first National Consultative Assembly decided to sell state land, but this decision was dictated not so much by a wish to carry out a reform in tenure, as by a desire to increase the production of the land and thus the revenue of the state. The assembly's decision was not, however, implemented on a large scale partly owing to the suspension of Constitutional Government in 1911.

The next step was taken by Seyyed Zia-al-din Tabatabai who became Prime Minister after the coup d'état of February 1921. He announced that state land would be distributed among the peasants and the relationship between landlord and peasant would be modified. His Government survived only a few months and the project came to naught.

During the reign of Reza Khan, who was associated with Seyyed Zia-al-din in the coup d'état, much new state land was acquired mainly from the confiscation of the estates of rebels and tax defaulters.

From 1927 onwards, some state land was sold in Khuzistan.
region and elsewhere with a view to encourage peasant proprietorship.  

The distribution which took place in Sistan region, beginning in 1933, failed dismally owing to the malpractices of the Government officials, the oppression of local land owners and inadequate control of irrigation. In 1939 a law was passed to modify the existing system of land tenure, but the precarious international situation prevailing at that time led the officials to decide against its immediate implementation.

On Reza Khan's abdication in 1941, his personal estates amounting to over 2,000 villages or parts of villages were transferred by a Decree dated 11th September 1941 to the State and were known as Amlak-i-vaguzari (the transferred estates), which in 1949 were handed over to his son Mohammad Reza Shah (the pre-Islamic ruler of Iran). They were alleged to amount between 1,500 to 2,000 villages and various items of real estate.

The next step in land reforms came in January 1951, when an imperial Decree was issued for the sale of the Royal Estates to the peasants. The size of the lots to be distributed differed with differences in local conditions, fertility of the land, distance to urban centers and so on.

In the spring of 1953, the sale of the Pahlavi estates was suspended by Dr. Musaddiq's Government and the properties were once more transferred to the Government. In August, however, Dr. Musaddiq fell from power and the Government of General Zahidi
held that the transfer of the Pahlavi Foundation to the Government was not valid. At a press conference on 26th August 1953, the Shah stated that he would continue the distribution of his estates to the peasants. Towards the end of 1950's the Iranian political community was confronted with major social, economic and political crises which seriously challenged the established political authority in the country. The booming economy of the mid and late 1950's gave way to an inflationary period with a 10 percent annual increase in the cost of living. The financial problems of the private Industrial Sector, the bankruptcy of many merchants and entrepreneurs and the bankruptcy of the Government treasury with an increasing budgetary deficit and drain of foreign exchange caused a further deterioration of the situation and gave rise to an overall economic crisis in the early 1960's.

The political crisis was brought about by several interlocking internal and external factors. The social and economic crises heightened the covert class conflict and gave rise to an overt conflict among the major socio-political forces. At the same time the ruling elements were losing their confidence due to the 1958 Iraqi Revolution and the mounting propaganda attacks from the Soviet Union; the United States began to apply some pressure on the regime to affect certain social, economic and political reforms.

The statement made by the then U.S. Senator Hubert Humphrey in 1959 was indicative of the American anxiety over the Iranian situation:
* I think there are revolutionary forces at work in Iran and I think these forces are at work in the tribes and villages* \(^9\).

Hence, the Kennedy Administration became convinced that land reforms in Iran were needed. By the U.S. Government pressure, Shah was forced to accept the 1960's Land Reform Bill, which was passed by the Assembly on 16th March 1960 and by the Senate in May 1960. The Bill was ill-conceived and badly drafted. Its main provision was to limit the amount of land which anyone could hold to 400 hectares (988 acres) of irrigated or 800 hectares (1,976 acres) of unirrigated land \(^10\). The implementation of the law, however, did not progress much beyond fragmentary actions largely owing to the absence of sufficient data and administrative machinery for carrying on such a comprehensive land distribution. Following the fall of two cabinets, cancellation of an election and mass demonstrations by the students and teachers in the early 1960's, the reformist cabinet of Dr. Ali Amini assumed power on 6th May 1961 under mounting American pressure. This cabinet was expected, by the Kennedy Administration, to implement the necessary reform measures of which the land reform was the master project.

Eventually, on 9th January 1962, Dr. Ali Amini and a few of his ministers signed a bill amending the land reform law of 1960 which was also called the First Stage of land reform.
4-2) THE RURAL SOCIETY PRIOR TO 1962 LAND REFORM:

4-2-1) PATTERN OF LAND OWNERSHIP:

The most important feature of land ownership in Iran before land reform was large scale proprietorship. The common unit of land ownership was the village (deh), an imprecise concept since villages varied considerably in area and population. Villages varied in size from 10 families in small clusters of houses in the mountain valleys to over 400 families in large villages on the plains. Traditionally the village was divided into six arbitrary parts or shares (each part called dang). As it was physically indivisible, ownership of the whole village was called shish-dang (ownership of six parts). The predominant pattern of large scale ownership was a mixture of public and private land. Village ownership consisted of four kinds of properties:

(a) Khaleseh (State owned) land;
(b) Saltanati (Crown owned) land;
(c) Vaqf (Religious endowment) lands; and
(d) Arbabi (Private ownership) lands.

Alongside these forms of feudal property, there was absentee small ownership of a plot of village called Khurdeh-maliki (petty landlords and landed peasants).^n^ (Tab1
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