Chapter III

IRANIAN RURAL SOCIETY, PRE LAND REFORM

3.1 Iranian Rural Society and Its Population:

Before land reform programme of 1962 about 65 to 70 per cent of total Iranian population was living in the rural areas, occupying between 55 to 70 thousands villagers the number of which was varying between 250-500 in each village.2

"Khosro Khosravi" in his book "Rural Sociology in Iran", has given the following figures about the number of villages and its population.

Table 3.1
Size distribution of villages according to population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>No. of villages</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 50</td>
<td>484140</td>
<td>21624</td>
<td>32.272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 250</td>
<td>3595785</td>
<td>27367</td>
<td>40.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251 - 500</td>
<td>3588185</td>
<td>10140</td>
<td>15.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501 - 1000</td>
<td>3561320</td>
<td>5170</td>
<td>7.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001 - 2000</td>
<td>2511150</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>2.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 - 5000</td>
<td>1708290</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>0.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5001 - 10000</td>
<td>805938</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10001 - 20000</td>
<td>779976</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20001 - 50000</td>
<td>1305044</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50001 - 100000</td>
<td>1156551</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100001 - 250000</td>
<td>1167881</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250001 - 500000</td>
<td>1779901</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500001 - 1000000</td>
<td>0000000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 1000000</td>
<td>2719012</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 25,163,113 670051 100.000

Source: K. Khosravi, Rural Sociology in Iran, p 9.
According to agricultural statistics year book of 1960, the total arable land in the country was estimated to 11.3 million hectares, cultivation of which was done by 2.4 million rural families (average land for each family including dry farming was 4.7 hectares).

As per the reports of Central Bank of Iran in 1963, about 47 per cent of total labour force of the country was engaged in agricultural sector whereas only 29 per cent of GNP was contributed by this sector.3

The Iranian rural society was dominated by absentee large landowners who were holding at least one six-dang village, these landlords had their own so called agents who had to make contracts with peasants for crop cultivation and in return they would have received a small share of production.4

There is no exact statistics about land ownership of that period. The sample survey conducted in 1949 in 1300 villages near Tehran provides the following data:
Table 3.2

Land Ownership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of land owned (Hectares)</th>
<th>Percentage of rural families</th>
<th>Percentage of land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-100</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 100</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Agriculture, Poverty and Reform in Iran by M.J. Amid, p.30.

According to above figures, landlords with more than 100 hectares represented only 0.2 per cent of total number of families and at the same time owned 34 per cent of the land. In other words 1 per cent families owned more than 55 per of the land.

The share cropping system was the major form of land tenure system in Iran before land reform programme. As far as landlord-peasant relation is concerned there was no major difference whether a peasant was working in state land, vagf land or in big landlords, since in all the cases the exploitation of peasant was strongly carried out in production
relations. The largest share of the product was taken by land owners and what was left for the peasants amounted inadequate to subsistence level. On the whole, the per-land reform agrarian system was characterized by the following features:

1) About 70 per cent of total population was living in the rural society.
2) The concentration of land and water was in the hands of few absentee large landlords.
3) Share cropping system as the major form of land tenure.
4) Use of out modeled technique of production.
5) Animal husbandry in rural and tribal economy had very important role, the revenue from it was about 37 per cent of total agricultural products.
6) After oil, agriculture had second place by providing 65 per cent of agricultural products in countrys export.5
7) The agriculture sector of Iran came in contact with international economy, this in turn affected the village life by shift in production from food-stuff to essentially non-edible cash crops.
3.2 Types of land ownership before land reform programme:

a. State owned lands (KHALISEH):

The origin of which goes back to pre-Islamic times. It include the villages and lands belonging to government. In the late 19th century this type of land was still a major form of land holdings. Until the Constitutional Revolution of 1907 Khaliseh in fact belonged to king, he had achieved this ownership through different means such as possessing from the people who revolt against him or from unclaimed lands. In 1907, the Khaliseh land was of three main categories.

1. Khalisehjat Naderi: Naderi land register, which comprised lands confiscation by the state in the time of Nader Shah.


3. Khalisehjat Nasser-el-din Shahi: This were included lands confiscated for arrears of taxation and other reasons.6

The above mentioned lands were not administered by the state totally. Some of them were
handed over to different individuals for life or short time period, these kinds of land were called Khalisehjat Entigali.  

At the time of Reza Shah different laws were passed permitting individuals to purchase Khalisehjat entigali, this in turn brought permanent ownership for those who had such lands under their control.

A second type of this source was called "Khalisehjat Tuyuli" which was basically used by tribes and in return they had to provide armed men for military purpose to government as a result of compulsory military service at the time of Reza Shah, this type of holdings were taken over by the chiefs of tribes.

The third category was known as "Khalisehjat Dewani," which remained in the full possession of Shah and later on was under government control.

Some of these land or properties were sold to private owners at the time of Constitutional Revolution. Lateron during the Reza khan the state land was reduced very rapidly since a major part of it was taken over by the Reza Khan himself.
The volume of khalieshjat varied in different periods, until the land reform programme several law were passed regarding the sale of khalieshjat. Since it made very little contribution to the finance of growing public expenditure, it was decided to sell or transfer them and according to different laws such as October (1931-1934), it was achieved. In addition to the policy of selling khalisheh to private individuals which was dictated mainly by a desire to improve the state of cultivation of the country and thereby to increases the revenue, khalisheh land was used in part to implement Reza Khan’s policy of settling the tribes, and his policy of reducing the power of the large land -owners by breaking up their estates was another series of laws, permitting the transfer of khalisheh to persons who were exciled from their original home in part exchange for their original estates.

According to Iran Almanc (1963), khalisheh covering about 3 per cent of all villages before the land reforms, that too were located in very dry, barren lands and in arid mountains, because the most fertile lands were sold and turn to become private property and what was left in the hands of government was very poor land.
As we mentioned earlier due to several factors, the number of government-owned villages before land reform programme by 1960 the government had more than 1500 villages under control mainly located in the province of Khuzistan, south-east (Iran and Afganistan border), and the North-West (Turkey-Iraq border).\textsuperscript{10}

The total number of villages owned by government in 1948, was 1373 which form 3.5 per cent of total villages in Iran. This figure was almost without much change until 1961. The total agricultural production in state lands was estimated to 12,000,000 Kharvar per year (1 kharvar = nearly 300 kg.).\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{b. Royal lands, crown lands and crown estates:}

Lands and villages owned by Pahlavi dynasty, were usually by means of expropriation, confiscation or forced purchase at exceptionally lower prices from the original landlord owners. The number of villages under Royal lands has been estimated between 2000-2400 in 1941,\textsuperscript{12} considering Reza khan as the biggest landlord of the country, who had the best fertile lands under his control mainly situated in the northern provinces of Iran, (border of Caspian Sea region). <a> The total
crown estates of a Reza khan has been estimated as follows:

1277 - (six dang villages, complete ownership of the villages)

706 - Partial ownership of villages.

1975 - Postural grasslands.

2381 - Different buildings (including shops, villas, factories etc.).

In 1950, the total land property of Reza Khan was estimated to 2.5 million hectares, equivalent between U.S. dollar 62-65 million. (Their value was about dollar 62 to 65 million).

About 235,000 people (50,000 families), were living in those land and had the share of 157 million rials in cash per anum. Whereas the revenue for Shah was beyond 550 million rials.

After Reza Shah's abduction in 1941, the government took all the royal estates under its control.

A year later, according to new law passed by the parliament the return of land was granted to its former land owners. Few year later in 1949, the lands were returned to the Shah, under the condition that their revenue (Mogufat Pahlavi and Pahlavi's, Foundation) to be used for charity and other social
purposes (e.g. promotion of public health, education and etc.

Few years later the national struggle against Mohammad Reza Shahs regime reached to its peak and in 1953, under the leadership of Mosadegh (the new prime minister of the country), the new office for state lands was established under the Ministry of Agriculture through which royal lands came under supervision of this organization.

After the coup d'état of Shah in August 1953, once more he regained the ownership of royal lands. From 1951 onwards the sale of royal lands among peasants started for the period of almost 20 years, and part of crown lands were sold, partially to the peasants but mainly to the wealthy landlords and even members of royal family. However, according to Iran Almanc (1953) the crown villages constituted approximately 24 per cent of all villages before land reform programme. The main purpose of which was to have support of rural masses for his regime.
c. Endowed Lands, Land owned by religious institutions (Amlakk Mogufat or Vagfs):

Endowed lands were another major type of land holding in Iran. It includes lands and other estates owned by religious institutions, schools, mosques, shrines and etc. a part of which were bequeathed to believers.

Vagf lands were of two types, public or charitable and private or personal. In case of the former it was given to religious institutions by its landowner and benefits of which were to be spent for the support of religious classes, the maintenance of mosques or shrines, the feeding of the poor people as well as public benefits in villages such as repair of irrigation channels (qhanats and etc). In case of personal Vagfs, it was a kind of private properties because those who endowed lands, used its revenue for their own personal purposes. According to Islamic law a vagf must have an administrator who receives 10 per cent of the produce (benefits) for his work. As stated by M.J. Amid in his book, "a person could be the administrator of his endowed land and while using it for his personal purpose, secure it from usurpation."
Until the Constitutional Revolution the endowed lands were completely under the administration of holly shrines and several other religious institutions. Later on it came under the endowment office of the Ministry of Education but still its revenue was given to its former holders (the religious institutions). The basic role of the government during this time was the supervision of all vagf lands.

Under the vagf administration the endowed lands were usually leased out to farmers or to the third person rather than worked by share croppers. Generally when such lands were rented for short lease, they were often badly treated since the lease had very little interest in the condition of the land because over short period of time it could not be economical for a farmer to spend for the betterment of it. Another important reason was the peasants poor condition which did not permit them for such investment.15

In 1941, according to new law government decided to sale the public vagfs (except lands with big religious centres such as Imam Reza), but it did not come into practice since six months later, after the Reza Shah's abduction the law was abolished.
Vagif lands were founded all over the country. The largest concentration of vagif lands were in Khorasan, Kurdistan, Khuzistan, Arak, Fars, Kerman and Tehran.

d. Big landlords:

Big landlords were those small fraction of the population who had controlled (owned) quite large number of villages. The most common characteristic of large landlord class is that they were for the most part absenteees. Mostly living in the capital and rarely they visit their villages. Seldom, it could happened that a large landlord would live in his estate. This could happened if he had his many villages close to capital, but would have never gone into more remote areas of his properties. The big landlords had their agents (Mobasher) who were in full charge of administration in villages regarding collection of land tax and any other things from peasants. In the beginning this type of land ownership was of few but in later years as result of historical development the number of big landlords class had increased in the Iranian agricultural society.
The composition of the above class was not a homogenous because always land owner could be a royal family member, a senior officer, a religious or tribal leader, a merchant and etc. Large landowners were considered to be the core of Iran's dominant class through their economic and political power as well as their social status. Many Majlis Deputies (parliament members) had active role in the landowning class through their post and influence over government officials.

According to study and finding about political elites before land reform programme, about 55.7 per cent of the fathers of the members of political elites were landowners. This was a golden opportunity granted towards them by enacting laws favouring the vested interest of the landowning class. Between 1907 to 1961 the /per centage of majlises deputies, as a landlord was as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1907-1924</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-1941</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1960</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Land Reform, Some Asian Experience, p 19.
Among these landlords the following major categories were found in Iran.

1. Those who had owned between 9-215 six dang village each;

2. Those who owned between one -eight six dang each;

3. Those who owned between 1/6 to 5/6 share of a village each.²⁰

All together, were small fraction of the population who had control over quite large number of villages that too the most fertile lands and sufficient waters (rainfall), with more irrigation facilities.

The change in the composition of landlords was followed by some changes in the nature of land ownership, position and the size of his estate.

Foot note - One dang was 1/6 of a land; and six dang means the whole part of land which has been divided into 6 arbitrary parts.
One of the main changes for this particular class took place in the beginning of this century at the time of Constitutional Revolution (1906), when Toyuldari was abolished. Later on during the period of Reza Shah where comparatively strong administration brought under its control all the classes in society. As stated by Mrs. Lambton: change has been in fact to alter the status of the large landed proprietor from that of a petty plus territorial prince to that of an ordinary landowner.\(^{21}\)

However, as we mentioned earlier, the large landowner class was combination of different groups such as tribal khans, religious leaders, the king, government officials, rich merchants, and etc.

The amount of land in case of large landlords was estimated over to 100 villages which could be in one region or divided in different parts of the country.

According to Dr. Azkia and F. Halliday the big landlords were in number and the most powerful ones among them could not exceed from 400-500 where some of them owned up to 300 villages. In Arak 2 to 3 landlords had more than 150 villages.\(^{22}\) About 75 per cent of lands under cultivation was in the hands of big
landlords, majority of them own 5 to 6 villages each and few own as many as 20 to 30.\textsuperscript{23}

In Azerbaijan (region of Maccoo, about 6 families had almost 90 per cent of land under their control, having average of 20 to 30 villages each.

Kurdistan, Khuzistan had predominately in the hands of large landlords. In the middle of 20th century Gilan was another region where 90 per cent of lands belonged to large landowners. Land in the province of Kerman totally was owned by big landlords, mainly religious leaders, merchants,\textsuperscript{24} government officials were the main landlords of the region. In the Khorasan one of the big landlords had as many as 85 villages.\textsuperscript{25}

Shah as a biggest landlord of the country before land reform programme had the best lands under his control in different parts of the country but mainly in the caspean sea region. The number of villages owned by the big landlords has been estimated about 10,000 throughout the country.\textsuperscript{26} Land ownership before land reform programme was as follows:

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Table 3.3

Land ownership in Iran Before Land Reform Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Villages (per cent)</th>
<th>Land (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34.443</td>
<td>56.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.93</td>
<td>33.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>10.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>10.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.10</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol.1 (1968)
Quoted from Iran Dictatorship and Development by F. Halliday.

Landownership in Iran has been a kind of social prestige, economic advantage and political power. Hence it was of great value and influence for the landlords class. This was how the practice of buying lands was customary in Iraian society and the sale of land was regarded as a discreditable operation and was avoided as longer as possible.27 The history of big
land-ownership in Iran perhaps as old as many centuries, the reason is because this class have always enjoyed the privileges of it as a strong social group by the powerful means of mass support.

According to Dr. Pour-Afzal and Najafi, those who came to power had used the land ownership as a means to strengthen their socio-economic and political power in the country.\textsuperscript{28}

Right from the beginning of 20th century private land ownership started to emerge rapidly mainly as a result of decline in other types of landownership, for example the sale of state lands right at the end of the 19th century by Qajar dynasty for the purpose of meeting the financial needs of monarch. In 1907 as a result of Constitutional Revolution followed by abolition of Toyuldari by the 1st National Assembly\textsuperscript{29} the volume of private lands increased considerably. During the regime of Reza Khan several laws regarding land holding were issued. Around 1930's and after new laws gave legal landownership titles to those who had the land property for 30 years or more. Among the private landowners Reza Khan was the biggest one whose lands were transferred to his son after his abduction in 1941.
However, out of 55,000 villages in Iran by early 1960’s 4 per cent were owned by the crown, 10 per cent by the state, 10 per cent by vagf (both religious domain and private vagf) and the remaining 76 per cent by private owners. 30

e. Small land owners (Khurdeh Maleki):

This was another type of land ownership where the land was distributed between two or more landlords in a village, in this kind of ownership generally one village had few proprietors.

According to K. Khosravi’s definition khurdeh malek were those who had between 1 to 100 hectares of land and in many occasions they had peasants who were working in their lands. 31 He has further classified this group into more sub-groups:

1. Small land owners who had between 3 to 5 hectare who normally had their family working in it.

2. Small land owners who had peasants to work for them.

3. Small land owners who share their production with their peasants accordingly.
However, khurdeh-maleki in different parts of the country had different definition, for example, in Azerbaijan a person who had less than 5 to 6 villages was considered to be a khurdeh malek. The number of khurdeh malek has been estimated up to 800 to 850.32

f. Peasants Proprietors:

Peasants were the major social group of Iranian rural society who were engaged in agricultural and related activities. As a result of usurpation the major parts of agricultural lands by rich landlords, the peasants were left without any lands in their hands. According to a survey about 60 per cent of rural peasant families were of no land and 10 per cent had only 1 to 3 hectares of land.

By dividing the 128,840 hectares of farmland of Sistan and Baluchestan, by the number of operating households holding land, we find that each household holds an average of 2.7 hectares.

On the basis of following table we conclude that 50.9 per cent of operators, who had own less than 1 hectares of land, cultivate 7 per cent of the total area of Sistan and Baluchestan whereas 64 per cent of the
operators owning more than 50 hectares, have at their disposal 31.7 per cent of the lands of this Ostan = State \(^{(a)}\), and 41.41 per cent of the total operators who own 1 to 5 hectares cultivate 40 per cent of the lands. \(^{33(a)}\)

Table 3.4

The distribution of agricultural operators by area of holding in Baluchestan and Sistan (1960-61)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of holdings (in hectares)</th>
<th>No. of Operators</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Area of Holding</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 0.5</td>
<td>16500</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>3421</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5 to less than 1</td>
<td>7425</td>
<td></td>
<td>5600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to less than 2</td>
<td>75500</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>10096</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to less than 3</td>
<td>5175</td>
<td></td>
<td>12388</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to less than 4</td>
<td>2250</td>
<td></td>
<td>7713</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to less than 5</td>
<td>5025</td>
<td></td>
<td>21493</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to less than 10</td>
<td>2475</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>16741</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to less than 20</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>10586</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to less than 50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to less than 100</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>13264</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 to less than 500</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>27538</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total                          | 46988            | 100.0    | 128840          | 100.0    |

The primitive production methods in Sistan and Baluchestan indicated by statistics relating to the power employed in farming work. In the year (1960-61) about 60.74 per cent of operators made use only of animal power, for their cultivation work, 2.23 per cent of machine power 1.59 per cent of both machine and animal power and 5.42 of only manpower. 33b

The hiring of plough animals is quite common: 46.3 per cent of the operators have borrowed ploughing animals from the gavezands but the proportion of operators who have borrowed such animals differs in various holding classes, operators who own between 0.5 to 1 hectare of land hire ploughing animals is 56.57 per cent while those of 2 to 3 hectares hire 76.81 per cent, thus 61.52 per cent of the agricultural operators who own 10 to 20 hectares, hire 61.92 per cent while in the subsequent classes of 20 hectares and over the number of such people falls to the zero. 33c

Several studies and report about rural life before land reform programme agree that majority of peasants were unable to fulfill their needs with their income inspite of all their efforts.
As we have mentioned earlier, the private landlords were the main proprietors of land and had the best piece of lands in the most fertile areas of the country close to the main cities with several roads leading it to cities, hence what was left for peasants as a land, was nothing but several small piece scattered all over the country, mainly found along the south-western and southern borders of the central desert which is basically less fertile and more remote parts of the country.  

There is no exact data regarding the actual size of the holdings of the peasants proprietors. Also the size of holdings differs from one place to another place throughout the country e.g., a piece of agricultural land in the central part of Iran is between 2-3 Jarib (0.2 acre), in such cases the peasants holdings are too small to afford adequate income for the family.

The average income of peasant from his land in 1945 was between 59 and 224 pounds. Apart from this fact, there was great differences of annual income among peasants in different parts of the country. e.g., the annual income of peasant families in the south east varied between 8 to 80 dollars in 1954. At the same
time the average income of a family in the province of Gilan, Mazandran and Azerbaijan was 516 dollars. 36

Two pre-reform multi-village sample surveys done in 1954 reveal that, there were villages in the south-east where the poorest peasants made 8, 10 or 14 dollars a year and even the richer cultivators made only 5 to 6 times that much per family. Whereas, a village in Mazandran, below the Caspean sea the peasants families income average was 1037 dollars per year.

In the near by areas of Kashan where demand for irrigated land is high, the size of holding owned by most peasants varies from 2-3 jarib, whereas a peasants family can cultivate up to 30 Jaribs (2 acres approximately) and where there is holding of 6-7 Jaribs, the peasant usually own two oxen, two donkeys, fifty to sixty goats, the dropping of which are used chiefly to manure the grand. Peasants with 2-3 jarib holding normally own two donkeys but for ploughing borrow or hire oxen from a more prosperous neighbour. 37

However, the low income of rural population ended with mass poverty, it was basically northern part of the country which was rich in rice growing and at the
same time the income of peasants were comparatively high to meet their essential needs. "The most common diet of rural people was bread. The high concentration of land ownership along with the large share of the crops extracted by the landlord, was the result of very inequitable distribution of agricultural income.

As mentioned by M.J.Amid and N.R.Keddi, many peasants were forced to borrow for their survival, if they managed to maintain a bare subsistence without borrowings, they might be forced to borrow for other expenses such as tools, seeds and draught animals.

Due to absence of proper institutional credits, the peasants had to appeal to their landlords or village money lenders who in return used to charge very high interest rate, such as 240-800 per cent per annum as per finding of survey team in 1954.

3.3 Types of Land Tenure System: Pre-Land Reform:

Before the land reform programme, there were 3 types of land tenure system in the rural society of Iran. There were:

1. Share cropping (Mozare-eh).
2. Fixed rental in cash or in kind (Ejarei).
3. Owner-operated farm (Melki).
The table below shows numbers and areas of Iranian holdings by type of tenure in 1960.

### Table 3.5

**Numbered Areas of Holding By Type of Tenure in 1960**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Tenure</th>
<th>Number of Holdings (Thousands)</th>
<th>Percent of Holdings</th>
<th>Area in Thousand Hectares</th>
<th>Per cent of total area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share cropping</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7,021</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner operated</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3,353</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed-rent tenancy</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1877</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>11356</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to above table share cropping pattern was the most predominant type of tenure where more than 62 per cent of total agricultural land of the country was based on it.
1. Crop sharing pattern and land management (Pre land reform era):

The relation between landlord and peasant was mainly based on crop-sharing pattern where five factors of production: (land, water, labour, seed and draught animals), were taken into account. Theoretically one share was allotted to each factor of production and it goes to whoever provides that (the supplier of each factor receiving 20 per cent of the crop-sharing).

In another way, the annual produce would be divided into five equal shares and each share would be given to anyone who has provided one of the those five factors. However, eventhough the actual division to a certain extent was based on those elements, but it seldom made on the basis of allotment of five equal shares for each factor of production.³⁹

However, in reality share cropping pattern differed widely all over the country. This was due to several factors e.g., fertility of the land, availability of water, the type of crop, the productivity of production factors, the bargaining power of each party. Also the rental shares had been influenced by land customs and tradition which were more
favourable for landlord class. The major difference concerning the division of the crop was whether a particular crop was irrigated or unirrigated (dry-farming).

This in turn made the landlords share ranged from 20 to 80 percent. There were so many variations in the practice of dividing the crops between the landlords and the tenants, hence the general application to the different regions of the country was a difficult matter. Also winter crop and summer crop had different types of division. In dry-farming landlord had 1/4th of total production and remaining 3/4th or 75 per cent goes to peasants who had provided seed, labour force and animal (oxen). However, in this particular form of production (dry-farming), there are only 4 factors of production existing namely land, labour, seed and animals. Here the landlord provided only the land.

As far as dry-farming is concerned, the share of landlord was varied in different parts of the country. For example in 'Arak' and Fars it was 1/5th of the harvest, in 'Azerbaijan' it was 1/4th to 1/5th, in 'Khorasan', 'Baluchestan' and 'Khuzistan' this ratio was 1/10.
Though the land under dry-farming has not been so rich in fertility, on the whole, the crop division was more favourable to peasants.

Even in Irrigated Farming the share of landlord was varied according to the type of crop e.g. in case of rice, it was almost 50 per cent of the crop because for the rice cultivation a great amount of water was necessary. In case of wheat and barley in 'Arak' the land owners was getting one share and peasants would get 2 shares by providing the oxen, seed and labour.

In certain areas if the landlord had provided the seed, 2/3th of the harvest would have gone to him. In 'Isfahan' and 'Yazd' the division of the crops was 2 for landlord and one for the peasant.

There were different variation in the region of 'Khorasan' which is 7/10 for peasant (3/10 for landlord), 3/5 for landlord and 2/3 for land owner. In most of the cases in this region the landowner provides the seed.

In 'Kermanshah' division was 2/3 for the peasants. In 'Kurdestan' it was 1/2 (wheat and barely), for the areas close to town (Sanandaj) and in more remote areas it reduced to 1/5th for landlord.
The same pattern more or less was followed the 'Fars region' since it had different climate conditions prevailing. In the province of Kerman the share of landlord was either 2/3rd or 7/10th of the crop.\textsuperscript{48}

In the most dry parts of the eastern-south of Iran, where there was a great use of underground water (Qanats), the crop distribution was divided into 20 shares including 5 shares for the land owner, 5 shares for water supplier including construction and maintenance of qanats. And for those who were providing seed and oxen the share was 5 and 2 respectively and the remaining 3 was for labour.

In this case if the land owner had provided land and water he would have got 2/5 of the crop and by adding seed and oxen, his share would have become 3/4 of it.\textsuperscript{49} In such cases where the underground water (channels) were used for cultivation, the peasants share of crop was much less than the other forms. The main reason for it was the high cost of maintenance of such qanats that too was possible if the landlord was ready to spend otherwise peasants could not offer to pay for it. This in turn led to more unfavourable condition of life to them.
2. Owner Operated:

It was more common among peasants who owned their own land, farmed it themselves with the help of their family and in some cases with hired labour.

3. Fixed Rent Tenancy:

In this case the landlord might have leased or rented his land to another individual for a fixed rent or fee (exclusive of the product).

After 1930's, there were few occasions through which government tried to improve peasants' life condition. Many of them were never enforced. Among those legislative action, we shall refer to few of them below:

1) In 1946, the Ministry of Labour announced that all peasants engaged in share cropping should be given 15 percent increase from the harvest.

2) In 1953, during the time of Mousadegh, it was ordered by the govt. that landlords should give 10 percent of the total harvest in addition to 20 percent share for local public work, but soon after the fall of Mousadegh's government, this law was cancelled in 1955.50
During the same year on 22nd July 1955, the govt. granted the right of 50 percent of crop for the landlords. At the same time in several regions of the country where the use of qanats for irrigation was common, the share of peasants was less than 30 percent of the product. That means the landlord was getting more than 70 percent of crop. This was the common practice in the central as well as southern part of the country.

However as far as land tenure system is concerned the relation in public domain land, vagf lands and crown lands did not differ greatly from those of private land holders (private landlords).

In other words regardless of the form of ownership, the lands were lend to the tenants and rents were collected directly or through the agents of the land owners and remaining was the cause of constant poverty of the peasants and lack of confidence by landlords in agricultural section of Iran.

Apart from the share of landlords in crop production, peasants had to do other services, the worst among them was the service of unpaid labour (bigari) which peasants were required to perform on demand.
without any pay. Apart from that in several parts of the country, there were different dues such as paying pasture fees to the landlord, in other province a certain number of loads of fire woods, clarified butter, number of hens and eggs, roosters, in some other places sheep, lamb, several kilos of milk product etc., formed other kinds.  

Also according to sample survey, about 46\% (703 families) were doing unpaid service for their landlords at different levels as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of area</th>
<th>Percentage of free labour service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanandaj</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaser shirin</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birjand</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamadan</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sari</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garmsar</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golpayegan</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source - A survey on results of Land Reform, Dept. of Rural Study, Institute for Rural Studies and Researches, Tehran University, (1960-80), p.56
Regarding the behaviour of peasants and nature of obey by peasants, the survey group gives the following data:

Table 3.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The cause of obeying landlord</th>
<th>No. of cause</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>63.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>19.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>8.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customs &amp; Tradition</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>7.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1418</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source - As indicated in table 3.7, p.61

As per the above table, the highest percentage of obeying landlord orders were out of fear (63.46%), this reminds us of saying by peasant: "If one of us would forget to say 'good morning' to the landlord he would throw us off the land".55 The landlords were always suspicious about their peasants and their relation were always characterized by tension. They used to believe that, if ever peasants get opportunity
they would have cheat them by taking more share of the crop. On such assumptions, they used to behave and deal severely with their peasants all the time. The landlord could discharge at will a peasant at any time. Peasants had well understood that their means of living were in the hands of landlords and insecurity was a part of their every-day life.

Peasants had still to divide the small amount of their crop with other concerned people in the village. Among them the village headman (Kadkhuda) had a share of it for his service done to villagers and also field watcher (field keeper). In case of head farmer, each village had kadkhuda who was responsible to maintain internal security and order within the village. He had also the role of bailiffe (Mobasher) for absentee landlords as an agent to over see their interest in the village.56

Of course the role of Mubasher could be performed by another person, that is why in many villages there were separate mubashers and kadkhudas. In 1935 and years after, the government officially appointed the kadkhuda through country governors, upon the recommendations of village owners.
Another major role played by kadkhuda, specially during Reza Khan's regime (1925-41), was his role of drafting men from their concerned village for two years military service. This was done when govt. officials would have came to village for the said purpose. Kadkhuda, who was the most important person for govt. officials, had many ways of collecting dues from the peasants under his influence. Among those in different parts of Iran was cash payment from crop sharing peasants, one day free labour by peasants, receiving a certain amount of crop from the peasants etc. 57

Before land reform programme, the relation of landlord-peasant was concentrated on share cropping pattern as one of the main features of landlord-peasants system. Most of the landlords were absentee and had their mubashers who were the guardians of the landlords properties. According to a survey, about 23.17% of big landlords were not residing in their villages, only 15% of them were in villages and the rest was either Vagf land, kalisheh or state land. 58
The following table shows the no. of landlords who were absentee:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The kind of answer</th>
<th>No. of families</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlord has been absentee</td>
<td>1118</td>
<td>73.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlord was living in the village</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>14.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages have been Vagf or kaliseh</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>12.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1528</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source - A Survey on results of Land Reform, p.54

As per the above table, 73.77 percent of families have declared that their landlord was not living in the village, they were living in the capital city.
3.4 Peasants (Nasagdar, Buneh, Sar-buneh, Khoshneshines):

In rural Iran, only 60 per cent of all rural families had land for cultivation, mainly on share-crop basis which had to deal with the landlords.

Nasagdar:

Those who had land and right of cultivation were called 'Nasagdar', others who did not, were known as 'Khoshneshine'. K. Khosravi defines nasagdar as a right of distribution in land and water among peasants. Thus, the nasagdar had a right to cultivate a portion of an owner's land by using the water but none of them were entitled to any specific holding in the village. In practice the cultivation rights were hereditary. Traditionally, the elder son or if the peasant had no male children it was his son-in-law who inherited this right.  

Buneh and Sar-Buneh:

In the system of share cropping the shares were not necessarily equal due to the fact that village land was usually measured in terms of plough-land (amount of land which an oxen pair (juft-gaye) could plough in a farming year). In the system of share
cropping where land belonged to a landlord, peasants in most cases did not cultivate individually instead they formed a number of groups in each village (depending on its size of land and availability of population). Where each group was engaged in cultivation of land within their own group, such groups were called 'buneh'. Each buneh was combination of 2 to 8 or sometimes 12 share croppers along with two to four plough-land (each plough land is about 4 to 6 hectares) which lasts one farming year.61

The share of each peasant was given according to number of nasagh that too after the deduction of landlords share from the crop.62 Generally, landlord would have 20 percent of harvest if he was providing one factor of production. But, the landowner may well possess the water’s right and provide the seed and oxen, thus he was entitled to 4/5th of the produce.

According to Hoogland, "there were few villages in Iran where landlords take 80 percent of the harvest".63 In share cropping pattern, the economic position of the 'Sarbuneh' was better off than other members because often in addition to larger share of crop, also sarbuneh had additional means such as yearly bonus from the landlords.64
Khoshneshine or Aftabneshine:

Khoshneshines were those peasants who neither owned nor-share cultivable land. Literally it means those who seat comfortably in the sun and it was from the fact that those who did not have land, had easier life hence, they did not have to worry about all the problems associated with farming. Khoshneshines were consisting about 40 percent of rural population in 1960's. They were not of homogenous group, among them 4 main groups could be observed.

1) Including pedlers, small merchants, retailers, shopkeepers, local money lenders, mill owners as well as owners of oxen were in this category. The village shopkeeper was the one with whom peasants were in more contact because that most essential commodities like tea, sugar, rice and wheat were not produced and available locally, also the stock of foodgrains of peasants used to be finished by the mid-winter, therefore they had to borrow from shopkeepers who in turn were charging peasants by taking 70 to 100 per cent interest. This was due to the fact that the advances were given in the winter time when the prices were very
high and were repaid at harvest time when prices were at their lowest. So at harvest time the peasants entire due may already have been mortgaged.

Other profitable activities of shopkeepers, were providing loan to peasants against their crop. Sometimes they buy agricultural production in advance with very low price since the peasant had no other means of survival, which draws them into more and more critical conditions. In some areas, khoshneshinges were taking part in agricultural activities by providing oxen for ploughing, this group were called 'Gaveband' or (owner of oxen). Since ploughing was and still is largely depend upon animal power, considering it one of the five important factors of agricultural production, receiving 20 per cent of total product.67

The share of gaveband from total harvest could raise up to 40 per cent if he was providing seed and oxen together.68

2] Second group: Includes non-agricultural labours such as barbers, public bath-keepers, field-keepers, shoe makers and so on.
3] Third group included artisans of village, including carpenters, blacksmith, potters, carpet weavers etc. From the social point of view this group were better off conditions than the group second, specially the blacksmiths and carpenters who had important role in agriculture. For instance, the blacksmith had to make the iron part of yokes, spades, shoes for oxen, the remaining part of yoke made of wood was the job of carpenter. Apart from it they had to make shovel handles plough, harrow and threshing beams, windowing forks, etc. According to Hogland second and third groups, together consist 10 per cent of khooshneshines populations.

4] Fourth group : Consists of landless peasants who did not have regular job and their livelihood depend upon seasonal activities of agriculture. This group were forming about 80 per cent of total khooshneshines population. 69

Poverty was considerably much higher in this group than in any other one. They had very limited work opportunity because agriculture in most parts of the country was seasonal and the peasants did the most of the work by themselves, therefore such people could only work at harvest time by providing their services in
those places where local man power was insufficient. Once the grain harvest was completed, the demand for agricultural labour declined sharply, and they were forced to search for any kind of job that may reduce their hunger, therefore they travelled to towns where they had opportunity to work at various unskilled jobs.

However most of the khooshneshines suffered from hunger, malnutrition, absence of medicine, etc... along with social discriminations prevailing in rural Iran.

3.5 Income Distribution and Peasants Standard of Living Prior to Land Reform Programme:

Uncertainty of land tenure system, small size of land holdings, inadequate irrigation facilities were among the several obstacles in Iranian rural society. Also absentee of landlords, indebtedness of the peasants along with their week bargaining power had major role in the slow growth of agricultural economy in the country. As stated by Lambton, debt was considered one of the curses of Iranian rural life and it could be obtained from different sources available within the village boundaries. In practice the peasant is often obliged to borrow from the landowners, money lenders and village
shopkeepers or even a fellow peasant who for some reason or the other was in better condition during the course of the year. Loans were normally provided against the security of the next harvest, as mentioned earlier, loans were taken when prices were very high and it had to repay when it was at its lowest price, therefore at harvest time the peasants entire share of the crop could be taken away by those who had provided him the loan. In such condition the peasant had nothing to do for his survival until next harvest except to sell his belongings including their draught animals (if ever he had) to make life possible.

Apart from this, there were other natural calamities such as famine which could make peasant’s life much miserable, for e.g., in 1949 as a result of famine, several provinces of the country including Kuzestan, Azerbaijan, and other major regions majority of peasants under severe condition had to sell all their working tools (oxen) for their family survival.

However, the agricultural sector, comprising farming, animal husbandry, forestry and fishing, had the largest contribution in GNP by 1900. In 1900, agricultural and related activities contributed 80 to 90 per cent of GNP. From 1925 to 1950 it declined to 50
per cent and by 1959, contribution had fallen to 33 per cent. It further declined to 23 per cent by 1968. Also the gross value added within the sector during the 1960’s shows the fishing and forestry together contributed only about 1%, animal husbandry 40% and farming 50 per cent.

Agriculture had the highest employment in the beginning of the century by 90 per cent, in 1930 it was 85 percent, 75 per cent in 1946, 56 per cent in 1956 and 46 per cent in 1966. The agriculture being the major sector of economy was the most backward sector, having very low productivity before land reform in 1962.

Low productivity of agriculture was due to many factors, the most important of which were, absentee landlordism with share cropping pattern as a predominant system and low level of capital formation in agriculture. As per agriculture statistics year book, wheat yield was 1.2 tonnes, rice 2 tonnes, cotton 1050 kgs. and sugarbeet 15 tonnes per hectare of irrigated land in 1960’s.

Ford Institute was among several other research groups working under ministry of agriculture, did study of certain villages in different parts of the
country. According to their reports in 1954, later on in 1960s, there was a vast difference among the income groups of rural society, for e.g., in the South of Iran, the yearly income was varying between 14 dollars to 80 dollars per year at the same time the average income was 1037 dollars per year, in Gilan it was 526 dollars. According to the same report, the tribes of Iran had much worst condition than any other groups.

The findings of 1954 survey group states that: "No group of people in Iran are more poverty striken, more miserable, more exploited, than the sedentary tribal people. The Baluch, the Arab tribes, the people of Sistan and the Kurds to name only a few. They are ground down by their own khans or sardars or shaiks under the geise that the govt. is the culprit, while the govt. answer any signs of unrest by stationing large bodies of troops in the areas with no apparent attempt to solve one of the basic difficulties of an archaic or vicious land tenure system".

Another research group has given the following data of income for the year 1960. This includes peasants as well as other social groups:
In north Gilan, the yearly income was Rls 5682, in South Dezful, Shustar, Behbahan, Kohkiloyeh and Ramhormoz was Rls. 3468. The whole southern provinces (Khuzestan), annual income was estimated to Rls. 2167, Isfahan in the central region had Rls 1947 and Zanjan with the lowest income per year of Rls. 146. The following table shows the rural income groups in different parts of the country.
Table 3.10

Different sources showing the rural income in different parts of the country:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. no.</th>
<th>Name of the Research Group</th>
<th>Income per month &amp; Tomman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sample survey of Tehran and Damavand villages by Dr. Khajehnoori in 1959</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Amar in Iran, Survey of villages in Fars.</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Rural development in Sistan and Baluchestan planning organization in 1960, according to the same research group, the income was between 60-300 tommans (R1s 10 = 1 tommans)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Conference by Dr. Shapour Rasegh about social groups in Iran (about Sistan and Baluchestan in 1959)</td>
<td>85-250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Economic affairs in Planning Organization</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Research Ministry of Agriculture in Bojnord Golpayegan for peasants, farmers and barzigar</td>
<td>53-609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Study and reports on irrigation agriculture economy in 1956 in 'Kermanshah'</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source** - Ahmed Ashraf, University of Tehran, Institute of Study and Research, 1966.
According to table, the income of a family per month in Sistan and Baluchestan has been Rls 120, in Fars 700 and in Kermanshah 1250. In such conditions the peasants would have not been able to survive, even the law providing for compulsory education in 1943, did not bring much changes for improving peasants life condition.\(^7\) By 1961 about 85 per cent of rural population was illiterate. Even in 1966, only 4% of rural families were using electricity and less than 1 per cent was able to use pipe-water.

Agricultural sample survey of 1960's undertaken by Iranian authorities and FAO, have estimated the rural population of Iran as 15.4 millions and the cultivated area as 11.4 million hectares of which 39.9 per cent was annually left fallow. With including the follow land, about 1.9 million rural families had regular land holding position with an average of about 6 hectares. On the other hand, 1.3 million families had no such holdings except their labour to offer for their survival. As mentioned by H. Mahdav, an Iranian economist who was expert and participated in the early stages of land reform, stated that "about 10 million out of 15.4 million rural population belonged to the poorer class who have either
no land at their disposal or have less than 4 hectares to cultivate". This is at the root of Iran's agrarian problems. 80

3.6 Summary:

Prior to land reform programme about 65-70 per cent of Iranian population were living in rural areas, dominated by absentee big landlords who in turn had their agents to deal with peasants over agricultural matters. The large landowner class was combination of different groups such as tribal khans, religious leaders, the king, government official, rich merchants and etc.

The big landlords well dominating over the major part of agricultural land. The amount of land could vary between 100-300 villages. The share cropping pattern was considered to be the most common form of land tenure system. As far as production relations are concerned, the large proportion of the crop was taken away by landlord and whatever remaining would be the peasants share. This generally was not more than subsistence level. It seems that every right was taken for granted by big landlords. They could take a much as they wish and give as little as they would.
They would have expect every kind of work or service done by peasant without any return for it. The change with composition of landlord was followed by some changes in the nature of land ownership, position and the size of his estate.

Prior to land reform programme, agricultural productivity was very low due to so many institutional factors. The most important one could be marked as primitive farming practices, absentee landlordism and low level of capital formation in agriculture.

There was a great difference in the annual income of peasants society. In some cases it was varying between 50 to 225 pounds. The low income of rural population was ended in mass poverty and their common diet was a peace of bread, specially during winter season. Concentration of the land ownership and crop sharing pattern was considered the prime cause of low agricultural income. Although there were few occasions after 1930's where government tried to improve the peasants life condition, (specially during Dr. Mosadegh's government) but not may of them were enforced. The peasants therefore were left without any support. The only way to survive was to borrow from local money lenders who in turn were charging very high
per cent interest. Among all the groups in rural society, khoshneshines had the most difficult life due to the fact that they did not possess any piece of land. A great majority of khoshneshins were available as seasonal workers in the villages. They had the most critical condition and were bound to do lots of free services for their landlords. This was the condition of peasants prior to land reform programme.
References:


And


5. Pt (1 to 7) Dr. Vousoghi, *Rural Sociology*, p 189.


26. Ibid p 56.


28. Dr. Pour.Afazal., Land Reform and Large Scale Agricultural Units, Shiraz University, p 22.


30. Dehbod, Land Ownership and Use in Iran.


33. (a+b+c) Research Reports, Analysis of the Law Governing the 1st Stage of Land Reform in Iran, Tahqiqat Eqteadi, pp 141-2-3.


46. Ibid, p 309.

47. Ibid p 311.

48. Ibid p 311.


52. Ibid p 62.
56. Op.Cited No4,p 14
64. Op.Cited No9 p 37


69. Op.Cited No.1 a, p 96. and No.4, p 32

70. Ibid p 96, Ibid, p 33


72. Ibid p 383


76. Ibid p 132.


80. Mahdavi, *Iran's Agrarian Problem*, Quoted From Keddie p 158.