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BOOK REVIEWS

Effects of Land Reforms in Saurashtra—Report of a Survey sponsored by the Research Programmes Committee, Planning Commission, New Delhi, R. R. Mishra, Vora & Co. Publishers Private Ltd., Bombay, 1961. Pp. xv + 240. Rs. 12.00.

The publication embodies the results of the research project on the evaluation of land reforms in Saurashtra which the author undertook on behalf of the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission. The report is comprehensive and covers not only land reforms, but also other agrarian measures initiated by the then Government of Saurashtra to promote a favourable agrarian pattern in the region. An account of the rural economic conditions in Saurashtra as well as the thinking and data which went into framing the land reforms, particularly those relating to the *Girasdari* and the *Barkhali* land tenures is given to serve as a background. Saurashtra was virtually an unknown region so far as economic information about the region was concerned. Not much was attempted in the past by way of statistical and economic information services. In the few States where an attempt of this nature was made, the available literature was not quite scientific and comparable. The State of Saurashtra was in existence for only a few years, but the energetic measures that the Government took in the few years of their career, not only touched off agrarian transformation but produced as a by-product information relating to the region which was never obtainable in its entire history. Mr. Mishra's study collates the data and makes them available in a form that would constitute a revealing account of agriculture and rural life. To the few major publications that are available relating to Saurashtra the report should, therefore, make a valuable addition.

Some of the highlights of the study may be usefully recapitulated. It traces the land reform legislation from the time of its enactment to its enforcement and successful implementation, presents the resulting pattern of new tenures including the emergence of the *girasdars* and the *barkhalidars* as a class of owner cultivators of the *gharkhed* lands allotted to them, analyses the emerging pattern of holdings and land-ownership, brings out the financial implications of *girasdari* abolition including the pattern of borrowings by farmers to pay compensation and to meet other developmental expenditure from various sources including the land mortgage bank and refers to land sales and purchases consequent on land reforms. At a few places the author has incisively pointed out the inequitable nature of some of the measures either in their application or implementation. These are but the major aspects, but there are numerous other facets which also receive treatment in the course of the study. The striking among them are the various estimates of compensation and their impact on the exchequer and the developmental effort of the State, rapidity and uninterrupted manner in which the land reforms were completed, the relatively minor burden of compensation on the peasantry and the share of the State in the compensation without involving a block outlay or a continuous burden of debt charges either on the State or the cultivator. Controversy would certainly exist about the burden and the method and manner of sharing the compensation load and about the impact of the arrangement on the finances of the exchequer and the plan outlays. Controversy might

be even justified on the use of institutional land mortgage finance to pay the compensation. One would even be inclined to agree that but for the good times the cultivators passed through, the procedure adopted might have given a permanent blow to land mortgage banking in Saurashtra. One might even suggest that the compensation paid to the *girasdars* and *barkhalidars* and the allotments of *gharkhed* lands were far too generous. There is also considerable force in the argument that the arrangement to tag on compensation payments to annual assessments from land for a number of years is tantamount to mortgaging the future which deprives the State not only of revenue from agriculture, but freezes the scope for tax reforms. But there is hardly likely to be any difference of opinion about the swift and frictionless completion of the major tenurial changes in Saurashtra which in varying extent are yet a headache to quite a number of States in India. May be the prolonged oppressive background of the region or the hardy and responsive peasantry of the land provided helpful preconditions; but the way community development caught up in Saurashtra as compared to the tardy results flowing from the programme in the neighbouring Gujarat, there is every reason to presume that land reforms in Saurashtra came at the most opportune moment. They not only cleared the decks for planning, but opened the flood-gates of popular enthusiasm and response to the developmental activities that followed.

There are, however, some thoughts which the reviewer would like to share and check up with the author. The publication deals with agrarian reforms, but except for tenurial reforms, the others receive a sketchy treatment, perhaps because of limitations of time and resources. The treatment thus, instead of providing comprehensiveness, gives an impression of being sketchy and broken, particularly because on quite a few occasions, firm conclusions have been attempted on the basis of brief analyses. The Agrarian Reforms Commission which set the stage for the major land reforms in Saurashtra comes in for a relatively brief mention. Some of the concepts which the Commission developed and the guideposts to reform which they furnished deserved a more elaborate treatment if not for anything, at least for a fuller understanding of the problems of *girasdari* and *barkhali* abolition and the criteria and the policies that weighed in framing the relevant laws and the rules under them. A host of topics have been dealt with which conform to the objectives of the study laid down in the beginning. Most of them, however, do not help to reach the goals set for the research study. Instead, they appear to hang on the major theme and contents of the study. In places they actually appear irrelevant to the subject-matter proper. Absence of a correct sequence in presentation gives rise to confusion in sifting the data relating to pre-reforms and post-reforms periods. A rearrangement of the topics during the process of presentation might have mitigated the obvious discrepancies and irrelevancies which tend to be highlighted in the chapter scheme that has been adopted.

Some of the conclusions of the study might also not stand close scientific scrutiny. The study seems to imply that as a result of land reforms and the allotment of *gharkhed* lands a relatively equitable pattern of landholdings has emerged. The holdings at the top practically have disappeared while those at the bottom have been significantly reinforced. The pattern is now, therefore, sounder and stable in the middle tiers. The number of holdings have remained more or less unchanged. It has also been pointed out that land reforms have resulted in the

evictions of small holders and tended to inflate the ranks of the landless to some extent. Anyone acquainted with land reforms would agree that they tend to stabilize land rights and only lead to distributive justice in the long run, given other supplementary measures of agrarian change. Lands for *gharkhed* were to emerge from the substantial rather than the disadvantaged farmers. The basis of acquisition for *gharkhed* and, therefore, dispossession from tenants either of *gharkhed* or other lands was the economic holding or its multiple. This in the context of the outside limits set on *gharkhed* lands makes it difficult to conceive of evictions of tenants to the point of rendering them landless. These conclusions, therefore, would throw serious doubts on the benefits expected to accrue from *girasdari* abolition.

Similarly, a set of conclusions about the grant of *gharkhed* lands and the *girasdari* and *barkhali* cultivators might need a second scrutiny either because they are incompatible or contradictory. The study reveals that the area under personal cultivation of the *girasdars* and *barkhalidars* has increased. They are taking to cultivation enthusiastically and are responsive to change. At another place, it is pointed out that the land given on tenancy by them is on an increase. It is also pointed out that the proportion of current fallows is falling which it is claimed, suggests pressure of *girasdari* and *barkhali* population on land instead of a possible tendency to optimum land use in the face of the known fact of relatively low population density in Saurashtra. To crown them all, the study on the basis of an analysis of land improvements comments on the persistent attitude of apathy of these erstwhile landlords towards agriculture and a tendency to parasitic existence on tenants. Apart from other things, this would undermine the conclusion about the success of Saurashtra land reforms which runs like a thread all through the report.

Certain measures of land improvements and planning activities were adopted as indicators for measuring the effects of land reforms. The limited response by farmers to certain measures of development in the early years when both land reforms and planning were only initiated, was ascribed to defective planning. Some measures of land improvements progressed phenomenally at a later stage or in some parts and these results were ascribed to land reforms. A third set of land improvement measures had not quite spread and the reason for that was sought in the lack of resources with the cultivators or the unsuitability or superfluity of such measures in certain regions. Actually, anyone acquainted with Saurashtra will corroborate that there are certain improvements which are almost co-terminus with cultivation and they determine the scope or otherwise for cultivation in quite a few parts and have, therefore, become traditional and have to be virtually repeated almost every year. It should also not be forgotten that planning though limited in effect in the beginning caught up very rapidly in Saurashtra as indicated by the outlays and the results in terms of changing cropping pattern and higher farm production. A number of land improvement measures used as indicators by the author to ascertain post-land reforms developments were promoted and substantially financed by the Government under programmes of planned development. There is no denying the favourable impact of land reforms on development, only the difficulty arises when an attempt is made to isolate and ascribe these achievements as between a set of contributory factors. Such difficulties of measurements and conflicting analysis arise because of a wider canvass of coverage and the choice of the indicators. Particularly in regard to field sur-

veys and collection of data care should be exercised not only in laying down its scope but also in the choice of aspects for scrutiny and of accuracy and relevance of information collected. Where results arise on account of more than one factor, they should be clearly pointed out to explain any possible conflicts that might be read from the analysis.

Again, based on the analysis of land transactions that took place after land reforms, the reader is given to understand that they are a by-product of land reforms and reflect favourably on the agrarian financial conditions. While on this analysis, the high land values were surprisingly attributed to land reforms as well as favourable prices of farm produce. Free transfer of resources including land within and between sectors would measure the relative remunerativeness of resources as between sectors. They would promote resource flows to points of maximum returns. Under Indian conditions, however, they precisely tend to do the opposite and cause distress. It is for these reasons that numerous restrictions on land transactions have been imposed in our country.

Going through the analysis on agricultural finance, it is difficult to resist the urge to put together such remarks as 'the money lender seems to be doing roaring business', 'co-operative finance is getting a foothold' and 'private finance in agriculture is gradually languishing' to underline the contradictions, unless of course, the comments relate to performances at different points of time or refers to different sectors of agricultural classes. Co-operative finance did not exist in Saurashtra. Concerted efforts to organise co-operative movement began after 1951. Unless co-operative credit has reference to mortgage finance to pay compensation, it is difficult to reconcile the achievements with the actual conditions which then prevailed. This is aside from the question of relevance of the analysis to the major theme of research. It is not possible to discern an attempt to relate the shifts in the quantum or pattern of agricultural finance to land reforms.

These comments are offered in a constructive vein and are in the nature of an academic exchange. They are certainly not made disparagingly towards the author who has attempted a difficult piece of evaluation under heavy odds. Most of our colleges have little of tradition, facilities and scope for economic research. To have done a major research study under such conditions speaks volumes for the author's capacity to do sustained and systematic work.

M. B. DESAI

Report on an Economic Study of Small Farming in Jamaica, David Edwards, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University College of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, Robert Mac Lehosé and Co. Ltd., University Press, Glasgow, Great Britain, 1961. Pp. 370. 28s.

In the above publication the author reports on a field survey carried out in nine typical farm regions of Jamaica. He covered a sample of 87 farmers for extensive study in one round and 27 farmers for intensive study in 52 weekly rounds. The regions are purposively selected but farmers are selected by random sample. He makes no claim to statistically representative sample. The information was