

Sir Azizul Haque on the Causes and Remedies of the Plight of the Peasants in Rural Bengal in the Early Twentieth Century

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***Abstract:**Most of the rural people of Bengal are agriculturists and the overall welfare of the province depends on agriculture. Because of this agriculture, one day the prosperity of Bengal increased so much that Bengal became the surprise of the whole of India - and the decline of that agriculture is the decline of the whole of Bengal today. With the agriculture of Bengal, not only the farmers have deteriorated - the kind of professions there are in Bengal - all of them have deteriorated. Because Bengal is an agricultural country and everything else is related to agriculture. Perhaps no one could ever imagine that the problem of land would ever arise in riverine Bangladesh. Due to increase in population, lack of industry-business etc. pressure on land increases. Due to this reason there is scarcity of land and the area of every farm has become smaller and smaller. Farmers and their families do not get enough income from it. The indebtedness of the farmers is the inevitable result of the deteriorating condition of the agricultural system and the farmers. As a result, the number of bargadars and subordinate raiyats increased tremendously. The development of farming and farmers of the country is possible only if the land rights are handed over to those who cultivate the land, the establishment of industry in the country on a large scale, the application of science in agriculture, etc. Education among farmers is a must. To improve the agricultural system, it is necessary to devise such methods which can be easily adopted by the poor farmers. According to Azizul Haque, the economic program needs to be set in such a way that it is possible to produce more food in Bangladesh.*

***Keywords:** Abwab, Banking Enquiry Committee , Commission, Sir Azizul Haque etc.*

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Introduction

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Most of the people in the rural areas of Bengal are agriculturists and the overall welfare of the province depends on agriculture. ¹ Sahitya Samrat Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay has long ago sung Bengali Sujala Sufla Malayajshitala. What is surprising is that the country which is born out of the silt of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra will be prosperous. This Shyamal form of Bengal is in the mind of Bengalis. And the main reason for the emergence of this golden smooth form of Bengal is agriculture. Agriculture is the mainstay of Bengal's economy. Because of this agriculture, one day the prosperity of Bengal increased so much that Bengal became the surprise of the whole of India - and the decline of that agriculture is the decline of the whole of Bengal today. With the agriculture of Bengal, not only the farmers have deteriorated - the kind of professions there are in Bengal - all of them have deteriorated. Because Bengal is an agricultural country and everything else is related to agriculture. ²

The whole of Bengal is still agrarian and agriculture is its only hope. However, before discussing what was the condition of Bengal's agriculture and how it would be developed, it is necessary to know a little about why Bengal's agriculture was so prosperous.

If we consider the condition of Bengal, the situation in Bengal was very strange. The internal trade of Bengal was very limited. The villages of Bengal did not have to go far to get rid of its scarcity. Either that village or the other two villages would have made up for his lack. It is also known that Bengal had a lot of international trade in the 18th century. There were many such rituals in Bengal at that time, due to which Bengal improved a lot. At that time, along with agriculture, there were many cottage industries in Bengal. Moreover, there were no problems in life now. Gone are the days of simple village life - in its place many troublesome city lives have entered the village. According to his income, his way of life was very inexpensive - so the prosperity of the peasants of Bengal was increasing. Earlier, the land was more fertile. In the past, the rivers in Bengal used to flood every year, sometimes very often. But every year due to a little flood the silt on the farm of Bengal increased the fertility of the land. Stay away from flooding, there is not much water in the river anymore. But earlier the fertility of the land was much higher as these problems were not there. This was beneficial for the farmers. Moreover, at that time there was a wonderful peace in the country which enriched the rural life of Bengal. Not only did the mind face complex problems due to restless thirst, it also did not have to worry about emigration - everyone's day was spent in happiness. ³

Perhaps no one could ever imagine that the problem of land would ever arise in riverine Bangladesh. People live on the land and make a living from the crops grown on the land. Man's relationship with this land is therefore an eternal problem in the history of mankind. The real reason for this special role of land is that the products of land are the only means of sustaining human and animal life. This is even more true in the summer country because agriculture is the sole basis of the entire economy there. Moreover, where the scarcity of food causes complications and where the progress and deterioration of man is exclusively controlled by the fertility of the land, the question of land becomes the question of human existence and one of the

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problems of human life. Land is an essential part of the productive economy and the nature of land management is equally important. If the farmer is not able to gather the necessary resources from his land and is deprived of profit, even if he does not get the wages of his hard work, then no arrangement or settlement related to the land can survive for long. In such a situation, the farmer becomes frustrated and leaves the land and becomes a landless labourer. The glory of the country, which is considered a symbol of patience, the existence of the farmer disappears, agriculture deteriorates, there is chaos in the society and ultimately the entire social structure is broken.⁴

The farmers of Bengal are poor. He spends his entire life on a small piece of land. The revolutionary changes and improvements in agricultural science in the present era have not touched them. As a result, the farmers plight worsened. The agriculture through which he makes his living is very ancient. On the other hand, due to the increase in population, lack of industry-business, etc. the pressure on land increases. Due to this reason there is scarcity of land and the area of every farm has become smaller and smaller. Farmers and their families do not get enough income from it. As a result, farmers are suffering. According to Azizul Haque, ancient agricultural practices, complex land-related laws, increasing numbers of middlemen, high rent rates, lack of arable land and labour industry, indebtedness and natural calamities are some of the special reasons that have led the peasants of Bengal to abject poverty.⁵

The indebtedness of the farmers is the inevitable result of the deteriorating condition of the agricultural system and the farmers.⁶ The burden of debt is a serious problem for the farmers of Bangladesh. However, this problem is not unique to Bangladesh. This problem is common in all countries of the world.⁷ In 1930, the Indian Statutory Commission observed that most of the farmers were in debt to moneylenders. As the debt burden increased, the farmers' land was transferred to moneylenders and non-agriculturists. As a result, the number of bargadars and subordinate raiyats increased tremendously.⁸ Several attempts have been made to determine the total amount of debt of the farmers of Bangladesh. The Major J. C. Jack, I. C. S. Consider this problem first. Later, Mr. Ashkoley provided more details. In this case, the report of the Banking Enquiry Committee is probably the most reliable. According to this report, the total amount of loans to the farmers of Bangladesh was 100 crore rupees (according to a 1933 survey, the total loan amount was 96 crore rupees, excluding the outstanding interest) and 160 rupees per family. The report of the Banking Enquiry Committee in different provinces gives the following information about the debt of farmers in different provinces of India (1928-29):

Farmers' debt

Province	Total Debt (Rs. crore)	Amount of Debt Per Household (Rs.)
Bombay (including Sindh)	81	329
Madras	150	19

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Bangladesh	100	160
The United Province	124
Punjab	135	104 (per head)
Madhya Pradesh and Berar	36.5	227
Bihar and Orissa	155
Assam	22	242

Is it necessary for the farmer? The answer is yes, the farmer must borrow. He has to live on credit until the crop is sold. Because he doesn't have any money.⁹ Now the question is why do farmers borrow so much money? The answer is that they are so poor that they are forced to borrow. The year there is a good harvest, they are able to buy the things they need. However, good years are very rare.¹⁰ Apart from this, agricultural uncertainty, poverty, poor health of farmers, ancestral debt, short-sightedness and extravagance, cunning tactics of money lenders, deficit budgeting, etc. are also considered to be the reasons behind the indebtedness of farmers.¹¹

The success of agriculture in Bangladesh is largely dependent on timely and adequate rainfall. Crops are often damaged by rain and other natural disasters. Untimely rains, hailstorms and other natural calamities have taken a heavy toll on the farmers. Due to these reasons, no matter how hardworking, enterprising and skilled the farmer is, farming always becomes a big risk for him.¹² The life of a Bengali farmer depends on his animal resources. But sadly, in terms of weight, size and strength, the animal resources of the province have been severely depleted.¹³ Abwab had been illegal since 1793. But the investigation carried out in 1872 showed that Abwab is collected everywhere in Bangladesh. There is a lot of confusion regarding remedial measures. Even in 1936-37, this illegal money collection did not stop.¹⁴ Apart from this, the biggest problem in all the districts of Bengal is the underdevelopment of Bengal's agriculture. There are very few crops in this area. The main reason for this is the unscientific method of farming.¹⁵ Many other problems may be mentioned. For example, population growth, loss of arable land, high birth and death rates, lack of preventive measures, poverty-induced starvation, wearing the same clothes until they are torn due to the inability to provide second clothes, lack of nutritious food and proper treatment, and illiteracy.¹⁶

The present condition of the farmers of Bangladesh is so bad that many people think that there is no hope for their betterment. Any possibility of changing the situation is remote and it is very difficult to overcome all the adversities that stand in the way of improvement. For those who have constantly thought about this, the future seems bleak. But the situation is likely to improve. According to Azizul Haque, there should be such a system in which the farmers and ranchers will not only be able to eat but will also be able to lead a better life with education and happiness. But it is true that there can be no improvement if the current situation does not change. The development of farming and farmers of the country is possible only if the land rights

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are handed over to those who cultivate the land, the establishment of industry in the country on a large scale, the application of science in agriculture, etc. ¹⁷

Education among farmers is a must. In this regard, the Government Agriculture Commission believes that primary education is very important for farmers. But it's not just education. The amount of literary education in Bengal is not done by hand. ¹⁸

There is no clear or definite way to prevent an economic disaster. However, in the case of Bangladesh, it will be easier to prevent economic recession if the base of agriculture is expanded by cultivating more and more minor and economic crops. Every disaster has a lesson for the future. According to Azizul Haque, the economic program needs to be set in such a way that more food can be produced in Bangladesh. More production is not possible if the land is well fertilized and irrigated. Keeping in mind the overall welfare of the farmers, the price due to the farmer should be determined in accordance with the market price of the finished product and it should be ensured that some profit is maintained in addition to the cost of cultivation. Evils like *Abwab* have deep roots in Bengal's land system and it is necessary to take the strictest measures to eradicate them. ¹⁹

These issues need to be addressed immediately. According to Azizul Haque, there is a need for planning, program, survey investigation, etc., but it is of no value if it consumes a lot of time and has nothing to do with reality. We have to take a realistic view of the problem. To improve the agricultural system, it is necessary to devise such methods which can be easily adopted by the poor farmers. All departments of the government, especially the departments of agriculture and animal husbandry, need to be guided by this principle. Proper planning has to be done so that everything that can be produced on the soil of Bangladesh is produced.

Lessons can be learned from the modern development trends of other countries of the world to formulate plans for the development of agriculture in Bangladesh. The economic welfare of the villagers is now the main feature of state activities everywhere. The larger interests of national life are now taking precedence over class or community interests. In other countries of the world agriculture is profitable because of intensive cultivation, successful use of new techniques, marketing system and development of cooperative system. In comparison to this, the agriculture and farmers of Bengal are far behind. To improve this situation, it is necessary to formulate national agricultural policy and national agricultural plan. In order to bring prosperity to the lives of the rural farmers by discarding the old doctrines and old methods, individuals, groups and the state will have to move on a new path.

In the past, the main feature of most of our activities was the predominance of the interests of the city and the people of the city. The weak and miserly farmer produced jute and sugar, but he never got the full price. But I don't need to dwell on the past. Because now we can look to the future. There is no point in blaming anyone. Now the interests of the people and the resources of the state have to be used together to build a prosperous Bengal. Whether the millions of rural farmers will be benefited or not, the government, local institutions, individuals,

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parties, etc. will have to conduct the nation-building and development work keeping this question alone in mind.

We must realize that the vast population of the countryside can no longer be kept satisfied by talk of fate or necessity. The farmer has now learnt to see the world, the glitter of the city, the grandeur, the wealth and the luxury. So now he can no longer be isolated from his field. Her demands today are few - a full meal for herself and her family, a little education for her children, and a clean and hygienic environment for her residence.²⁰

Finally, the current problems in Bangladesh are very complex and need to be addressed in a phased manner. There is no single solution for the welfare of farmers. It is not true that if the problem is solved, all the problems will be solved. There is an urgent need to reform the agricultural system and land laws, but that is only one of many problems. There are other issues to consider. If the overall economic outlook of the country is not changed in the interest of the villagers, the very foundation of our economic life can be broken. And instead of a stable social order, chaos may come and the whole of Bangladesh may be shaken by peasant discontent. If agriculture is neglected, the nation becomes powerless. In a democracy, except for millions of people, some people cannot live in peace. We have to remember that the vote of the farmer has changed the situation of the country and something has to be done for them before they join hands with social chaos. We have to be kind to them, because they are really very kind gentlemen.

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