OCCASIONAL PAPERS

AFGHANISTAN COUNCIL

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The three other papers delivered at this session on Afghanistan have listed "modernization" in their titles. A contemporary bibliography (Brode, The Process of Modernization) lists three features of modernization: (1) the change generated by industrialization and its impact upon the citizenry; (2) the rise of urbanism and its concomitant effect on urban-rural communication and migration; (3) the impact of the first two parts on rural residents. But modernization in the popular sense conveys an image of a noticeable improvement in the standard of living of the citizenry. Based on my research in the cis-Hindu Kush Valley of Kuh-e Daman (Figure 1), there appears to be only a few isolated instances of an increase in the general standard of living, and the impact of Kabul's modernization on Kuh-e Daman is minimal.

Monetization of the Rural Economy

Modernization of the rural economy in Kuh-e Daman by the introduction of a cash economy, which in some quarters is appraised as beneficial to the nation, can cause widespread hardship and increasing impoverishment of landless laborers and small landholders. The first effect of the advent of a cash economy in a community is a trend toward monoculture. To obtain cash, cultivators tend to grow very few crops, often a single crop, which brings an adequate cash return in the marketplace. Lacking adequate transportation to convey the commodity to the marketplace, the cultivator enlists the services of a middleman who not only transports the product to the market but invariably enters into a debt-credit relationship with the peasant. The interest rates on the loans are usurious, frequently reaching 50 percent of the original with total payment due in six months. A small event, such as the death of a donkey or bullock, or unforeseen family expenses, reaches calamitous proportions when heavy debt repayments have to be made. The cultivator usually is unable to repay the debt on time and after a few years of this vicious cycle loses his land to the middleman-moneylender or sells to the wealthy landowning class in his community.

Besides general impoverishment, there is some indication that the general welfare of the transitional community suffers. The focus on monoculture results in land being devoted to cash crops rather than subsistence crops. A basic community diet is often composed of barley, several pulses and orchard crops. These crops, supplemented infrequently with meat, provide a reasonable nutritious diet. Since wheat, and more so rice, are higher status foods, these cultivators obtain higher prices in the marketplace; therefore, the cultivator grows these cash crops to the detriment of his own diet, formerly composed of homestick produce. Another detrimental effect of the introduction of cash cropping is the rise of conspicuous consumption. The array of trinkets which confronts the peasant visiting the marketplace is tempting, and frequently large amounts of needed cash are spent on non-essential items.

Land Tenure and Use

In the Kabul hinterland, rapid changes in land tenure are occurring. No single system exists in Afghanistan, but the complex multiple land tenure types, indigenous and introduced, which exist in the Indian subcontinent are not duplicated in Afghanistan. In addition, studies on land tenure in Afghanistan are limited and fragmentary. No single volume on the subject exists. Land and animals are rarely taxed; hence there is no need for inventorying land at the national level. In south central Kuh-e Daman surveying under the auspices of a foreign aid program is being executed. The vast majority of land holdings at the individual and village level remain uncharted insofar as hectarage and ownership is concerned. Around Kabul, land is being acquired by city residents who have capital earned either from relatively well-paying government work or most likely earned by successful business activity.

In northern Kuh-e Daman, in Parwan and Kapisa provinces, over 75 percent of farms are owner-occupied with most farms falling in the 1-2 hectare size range. These farms are intensively cultivated as the high ratio of cropland to farm resident indicates, .2 hectare per farm resident. Grape growing is the prime cash crop in the Charikar—southern Jabal os Saraj area, but grapes are almost totally absent in adjacent Kapisa province. Grapes are grown in central and southern Kuh-e Daman wherever adequate irrigation water is available. Substantial quantities of vegetables and fruits are grown and are retailed in Charikar and all periodic markets in the Valley. As more water is made available to central and southern Kuh-e Daman via the recently constructed irrigation canal from the Panjhir River, more land may be devoted to grape growing.

Draft animals such as oxen are kept by cultivators who have balai (dry land) hectarage. Few animals are kept for food as mutton and kurut (dried buttermilk residue) are brought to the Valley by Pashtun nomads and Badakhshan Tajiks. Villages on the periphery of the Valley, contiguous with mountain pastures, rarely possess grazing rights to the pasture, and rely primarily on fruit, pulses, and nuts for a basic diet.

An epithet such as "backward" is often used to describe Afghan farmers. This is erroneously used. A few efforts at determining efficiency and innovativeness of Afghan cultivators indicate that these two qualities are present in a large segment of Kuh-e Daman's cultivators. Efficiency exists when, given the state of the farmer's knowledge of his set of resources, the cultivator maximizes his use of inputs, in order to gain the greatest output. Innovativeness refers to the early acceptance of "modern" agriculture technology. It is not accurate to gauge innovativeness by a Western measure, such as ownership and use of farm tractors, for these vehicles are well beyond the financial means of all but a fraction of cultivators. But other aspects of agricultural technology, such as the use of chemical fertilizer or new strains of wheat or rice, are valid measures. With proper instruction, Afghan farmers readily adopt new crop-growing techniques.

Ecological Effects of Modernization in Kuh-e Daman

Increasing specialization of cropping patterns has been prompted by two factors, the encouragement by foreign aid agencies to increase agricultural exports and the need to feed the rapidly growing urban population in Kabul. The
foreign aid effort concentrating on the various grape growing activities in Kuh-e Daman can be rated a minor success. Fruits and nuts are now Afghanistan's main earner of soft currency (a pejorative term used to designate currencies of several less developed countries). In addition to trade in nuts and raisins with India, Pakistan and USSR, Afghanistan also exports agricultural products to several Western European countries. In late summer and autumn, fresh grapes are exported to Pakistan and India.

The factors responsible for the relative success of grape growing activities and increased raisin exports must be the existence of a fairly comprehensive agricultural development package program devised for better care of vines and production of raisins. In addition to extending credit facilities, some attempt was made by the instigators of viticulture projects to seek out successful competent grape growers and advise them of superior cultivating methods. Supervision of grading processes was included as was the development of better marketing procedures. Similar procedures are now being extended to the production of nuts. However noteworthy the vine cultivators' efforts may be, the gain that accrues from increased production is frequently siphoned off by intermediaries, and little financial benefit is obtained for the cultivator himself.

Complicating the viticulturist's effort to increase production is his inability to revise contemporary riparian (water) rights. Modern agricultural practices necessitate that water be available in specific amounts on fixed schedules. Water rights in Kuh-e Daman are a culmination of half a millennium usage. Establishing priorities for water use in Afghanistan under present politico-economic conditions is impossible, for no cultivator or village would acquiesce to a system of water control which diverts water use to another user.

As urban incomes rise, so do appetites for high status foods over the prevailing urban diet of nan and chai (wheat bread and sugar-sweetened tea sans milk). Poorer, rural folk eat nan often composed of barley and pulse meal, not unlike the bannock once eaten in Scotland. Although ranked lower in status than wheat nan, the peas-meal nan is much more nutritious. More sophisticated diets mean that more rice must be grown, and this causes increasing demands for irrigation water. Scarce irrigation water could be used for more productive, nutritious crops, but the increasing urban demand will entail higher production in rice growing areas, and conversion of other irrigated arable land to rice cultivation. The pace of urban modernization creates insurmountable demands upon the rural population, frequently to the rural residents' disadvantage.

Influence of Kabul on Kuh-e Daman Markets

The large daily market at Charakar is supplemented by eight periodic markets and a few very small village bazaars which have less than 15 stalls (see Figure 1). Charah Bagh, situated on the hard surfaced road between Charakar and Kabul, is clearly the largest periodic market in the Valley, averaging in excess of 150 vendors in summer and autumn market days, Monday and Thursday. About one-fifth of the vendors are not native to Kuh-e Daman and come to Charah Bagh with commodities not produced in the Valley, such as cloth and clothing from Kabul, high quality rice from Laghman, salt from Kunduz, fruit from Hazarajat, raw sugar from Jalalabad, and livestock from northern Afghanistan. Prices in general are above the Kabul-Charakar level, but the market is preferred by vendors and buyers because of the large number of people who attend market.
Serai Khoja (Mir Bacheh Kat) market, held on Tuesday and Friday, has the highest general prices in the Valley. Most vegetables and fruits are brought to the market by truck from the northern end of the Valley. Goods at lower prices can be bought in Kabul 25 minutes away by bus, but most produce is bought in small lots; hence the trip would be uneconomical. Serai Khoja residents have more cash and credit worth than elsewhere in the Valley because of grape sales. The number of vendors at Serai Khoja appears to fluctuate seasonally; the largest markets occurring after the grape harvest, when cash and time are abundant. Kabul's influence in rural marketing in southern Kuh-e Daman is not based on its privacy as a large market center, but upon the fluctuations of agricultural labor and cash supply in Kuh-e Daman.

Kabul traders play a prominent role in Bagram and Gala Biland (Sunday, Wednesday and Friday, respectively), in central Kuh-e Daman. Both markets are east of the main north-south road and can be reached only by chartered bus or taxi or by foot. Vendors at these markets are one-third local, one-third from Charikar, and one-third from outside of Kuh-e Daman. Jabal os Saraj market, held on Fridays, offers few foodstuffs and concentrates on hardware and used clothing, goods which are brought from Kabul.

Kapisa province markets at Gultakar (Thursday), Deh Bala (Tuesday), and Jazal Agha (Saturday) differ considerably from others in Kuh-e Daman. The array of goods and foodstuffs is similar, but rarely do the goods originate in Kapisa. At Jazal Agha, over three-quarters of the Jazal Agha area resident vendors had purchased the goods in Charikar and Kabul. Itinerant traders from Kabul monopolized the trade in cloth and clothing and most of the hardware. Other traders in Kapisa buy in Charikar the produce they sell in Kapisa. The anomalous marketing situation in Kapisa can probably be attributed to the subsistence type of agriculture practiced, whereby diet is limited to a few homegrown staples, omitting fruits and vegetables, and a close-knit society with few innovators.

Market Hinterlands

Considerable variation in trip time from residence to market by a potential purchaser occurs around the markets. The shortest average round trip time, 23 minutes, occurs at Serai Khoja, compared to an average of nearly two hours at Jazal Agha. Duration of stay in the bazaar is longest in Bagram and the Kapisa bazaars, and shortest in those bazaars on the main north-south road. A substantial portion of persons attending the market never make a purchase. This segment may exceed 50 percent of attendees during the post-harvest season. Bagram and Kapisa province bazaars serve several mountain villages on the east and north end of the Valley. Large stretches of land that cannot be cultivated separate the mountain villages from the nearest market, so it is understandable that trip time is greatest in these areas. As bus fares are lower from Kabul than to the city in the morning, many potential customers will walk to the north-south road and travel north to the nearest periodic market on bazaar day. Hence the short trip time by the bazaar attendees along the north-south axis.

Rural to Urban Migration

One might assume that Kabul exerts a strong pull for village migrants in its hinterland. This appears true only for diurnal movements. Many residents in the
extreme southern portion of the Valley travel daily to Kabul where they work as miner government functionaries. However, information elicited from a survey of 62 villages overwhelmingly indicates that migration, seasonal and permanent, is in a northerly direction, to the Kunduz and Kazar-e Sharif area. Reasons cited by the respondents for this migration preference are better work opportunities and higher pay as artisans and agricultural laborers. It may be that low cost labor by immigrant Hazaras to Kabul has excluded the predominantly Tajik migrants from settling in Kabul. A sex bias existed in the respondents questioned since only males were interviewed and their preference for migration destinations was for the northern provinces. Some Pashtuns, usually kinfolk of post-1930 settlers, are building gahal and buying land, mostly vineyards in the Valley.

Although male respondents state a preference for northern migration, the Tajik brides migrate to the home of their spouses who, if they live outside Kuh-e Daman, invariably live in Kabul. No Tajik marriage network from Kuh-e Daman to the northern provinces was discovered. Since the preferred marriage is between parallel cousins, the male migration to the north may be of recent origin; otherwise marriage networks would have been established. Pashtuns still seek brides in musharaki (east), that is the Pashtun area astride the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Several marriages between Tajik females and Pashtun males were reported, but none vice-versa.

Conclusion

The evidence presented indicates that the "modernization" originating in Kabul does not diffuse into Kuh-e Daman in a manner which can be appraised as beneficial to the valley residents. The valley is a very fertile and productive area of Afghanistan, yet the residents receive little reward for their toil. Poverty and disease are widespread. Particularly depressing is the plight of Kalahan residents who lost their land and livestock (and women) during the late 1920's. As landless laborers they will not share in the prosperity generated by increased grape production. Nutrition declines as monoculture increases. It is worth noting that the highest incidence of smallpox in Afghanistan occurs in the valley, and the 1970 cholera outbreaks were largely confined to Kuh-e Daman.

In the area least affected by the privacy of Kabul, Kapisa Province, the residents seem determined to maintain the present socio-economic milieux. Outside vendors in the market places are rigorously screened before they are permitted entry into the bazaars. A surprising statistic is the small number of people who visit Kabul, even in the southernmost part of the valley.

If one can extrapolate from the Kuh-e Daman case, then the situation of other rural areas, farther removed from Kabul, may be worse. The benefits accruing from modernization have not trickled down.
Figure 1

NOTE: Toponym spelling on this map does not conform to the Anglo-American Board of Geographic Names transliteration system.