

Abstract: *This paper seeks to explore the historical evolution of the peasants of Punjab during various socio-economic systems that prevailed in the region. Beginning first in a sequence with Primitive Communism, the Asiatic mode of Production and later transitioning into Colonial capitalism under British Raj. From the earliest times, both the physical and human geography of India and specifically Punjab's terrain had a vital role in shaping the lives of the inhabitants of Punjab. The ruling State exercised a monopoly over the vast lands that were the source of revenues. The entire power struggle that took place during the course of 2000 years in India; lay for the sole purpose of monopolizing these productive lands. The Mughal Era reforms helped the ruling monarchs to further strengthen their grip over these revenue wells. The harsh exploitative policies directed against the tillers or peasants led to the stunted growth of the Indian economy.*

Key Words: Colonial Capitalism, Peasant, Canal Colonies, Agrarian, Mansabdars

Introduction

The significant events of the last century have led to worldwide recognition that farmers, who constitute the most important part of humanity, can play a special role in shaping public policies. The peasants of all lands shook World politics with their crucial social and economic importance. Historically, the Punjab region has remained an essential part of the Indus Civilization which holds the honour of being the first-ever agrarian society in human history. The tools of production i.e. land and peasant had remained traditional for centuries of cultivation. Punjab held to its agrarian nature during its entire history and it continued to be a part of the various Bureaucratic Empires that emerged during various time periods. The river Indus and other ravines emerging from the Himalayas helped develop the ancient agrarian society of India. Thus agriculture remained central to the lifestyle of the Indian population.

The first agricultural development took place roughly around 9500 to 7500 BCE on the western bank of the Indus at Mehargarh. Evidence of barley as a dominant crop has been found along with wheat. Goats and sheep were also raised at the time which shows an ideal picture of primitive communism in the Indian society. Such a mode of Production existed for centuries in the Indian Sub-continent. It was in 20th-century Marxist political and social sciences that the concept of the Asiatic mode of production re-emerged in the Western debates. The Marxist

theorist turned to the Asiatic mode of production to argue for different revolutionary strategies in agrarian societies under colonial and imperial rule. Marx's own concept of AMP was influenced by Aristotle, Montesquieu and W.F. Hegel, who saw the Asian continent as a sign of political autocracy and socioeconomic stagnation. Marx incorporated the Asiatic mode of production into his theory of the stages of social development which he adhered to primitive communism.

The Indian peasantry continued to suffer under the weight of outdated AMP that was enforced till the decline of the Mughal dynasty. The entry of European powers into Indian politics changed the course of Indian history. The British crown introduced reforms identical to the Western industrial setup and transformed for the first time the socioeconomic relationships from the orthodox Asiatic mode of Production to Colonial Capitalism. Nearly a century of colonialism preceded the steady emergence of the capitalist manufacturing sector in India and its subsequent development for an equally long period of time also under colonial rule. A small capitalist industrial class and land-owning class emerged as a partial fallout of the railway and canal colonies development promoted by colonial rulers in their own interest and whose primary effect was to strengthen and expand the geographical reach of colonial exploitation of India. The colonial capitalist enterprise commercialized the agriculture of the fertile lands of

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India specifically the Punjab to further safeguard their imperial interests. This was followed by peasant agitations to resist colonial repressions; first through militancy and then through class struggle. The canal colonies had provided a great number of peasants to challenge the state policies through a proper class struggle but it never materialized the way it did in Agrarian China, Russia and Indonesia.

Methodology

The nature of this study falls under qualitative research that includes utilizing analytical and interpretative techniques in order to understand the historical evolution of Punjab peasantry and Indian Agrarian society. The analyses of the peasants and the socioeconomic system have been done through the lens of dialectical Materialism. This paradigm views history as a continuous process of struggle between various classes of society. The fate of this struggle lies in the hands of the peasant class who produce the surplus for the landowners. Similarly, Marx and contemporary European scholars developed their understanding regarding the Indian socioeconomic system as traditional and stagnate. For them, the history of India began with British rule for they were the ones to modernize Indian agriculture. This can be witnessed during the land reforms in Punjab which gave a breakthrough to the peasants from Manu's codification of Castes.

Origin of Peasantry

The historical moment at which peasants were born into society came naturally only after the pursuit of agriculture had become the main source of food. A farming family can then spend most of its labour time cultivating and collecting seeds. In this whole process, not only the foragers (hunters) of food were turned into producers; the monogamous family itself evolved into the basic unit of social organization. Domesticated plants came with the Neolithic Revolution, and the two major zones where grains of cultivated wheat and bones of domesticated animals have been found include Belan Valley and the Mehrgarh region.

The domestication of plants and animals marked a remarkable stage in human progress, but a fully participatory agricultural revolution was yet to come. The highest potential of cattle remains untapped; with no trace of the plough. The future geography of the area allowed two growing seasons; *Kharif* and *Rabi*. Cultivated areas were in all cases very limited because there was no way to clear the dense forests and make the land arable. It was difficult to guess what the internal structure of these primitive communities looked like. Men had to hunt

and then raise cattle for meat and milk. The insufficient division of labour based on sex to produce a surplus would result in class division.

India's agricultural revolution was certainly based on ploughing. The plough explains the enormous expansion of Indus agriculture stretching from the plains of modern northwest Punjab to Gujarat. The Indus grew wheat, barley and cotton and the most notable crop was cotton which marked the production of industrial crops. The multiplicity of crops shows that the two harvest seasons were now fully operational. Agriculture has become an age-old profession that has led to the presence of the peasantry as a social class. The time of the emergence of the peasantry was clearly the rise of a divided society. Conventional agricultural practices meant generating enough surplus to feed some food producers. In the arid regions of the Indus, where agriculture had to expand; embankments to hold and divert flood water required a certain social and administrative organization. A small class exercised its control over underground resources such as bronze. It was further cemented with deities and priests which bounded both the rulers and ruled in a unique web of laws. Thus new cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro came to exist with their peasant masses.

The state of agriculture glimpsed through the Rigveda shows the endurance of the ox-drawn plough. Barley existed as a staple food grain, but rice seems to have begun to be grown in the upper Indus basin; so the two-year cycle still existed in a new form. Furthermore, the Aryans seem to have despised the dike agriculture of their enemies; Indra would have seen dams open to hold water. There is a possibility that the change in agricultural conditions was directly responsible for the disappearance of towns and their markets and the complete replacement of one authoritarian structure with another. Regardless of the authoritarian mechanism, the surplus always came from the farmers. Farmers were the masters of their fields. But these free farmers belonged to the superior tribes: a larger population would harm the subjugated Dasyu communities, forcing them to hand over their grain and animals. At the lowest level are dasas who work as cattle breeders, perhaps in the fields, or tending herds, for their owners. At the top were the aristocracy (Rajanyas) proudly driving their chariots with *Indra* as their role model, and monks (brahmanas) presiding over animal sacrifices and an elaborate ritual. A famous hymn from Book 10 of the Rigveda gives a picture of this class-divided society to which the creativity of the hymn seeks to ascribe to divinity. Simplified, however, the hymn's *Varma*

scheme seems to faithfully reflect the deep division of the peasantry into their free and privileged *dasyus* transmitted into Vaishyas and shudras, forming respectively the third and fourth *varnas*.

Rise of Caste Peasantry

From 500 BC onwards, the process of change took momentum which universalized the peasant production and created a caste-based peasantry. It was caused by two crucial factors i.e. the extended use of iron. With more and more extraction of metals, the cheapness resulted in diversifying its use. Iron tools were readily available to the peasants which was a major turning point. The cheap availability of iron democratized the agriculture sector. Peasants could afford iron axe to clear land for themselves.

The second key factor contributing to the spread of agriculture is the increasing diversity of crops. Sugarcane, indigo, and cotton can be noted in pre-common Indian and Greek sources. The development of urban markets resulted in the rise of cities from the 5th century BC onwards. These developments require more specialized and skilled labour and require rigorous decision-making based on knowledge of the soil and plantation. Once the greater efficiency of peasant agriculture is established, pressure to exploit surplus, whether in the form of taxes or rents, will strengthen its expansion. Peasants were the sole taxpayers in the kingdoms of the 4th century BC and later the Mauryan Empire, intensifying their campaign of tax extraction and seeking to settle more peasants. The peasants paid the king a tribute for the land in the form of a fifth of the total harvest. Kautilya Chankya argued that royal colonies should consist only of shudras-karsakas [peasants] and other lower classes, who were more vulnerable to exploitation. The large landowners with their own livestock and labourers, as well as the land cultivated by the ruler, still important in Arthashastra, could not easily survive in the new conditions. Even as ownership continued to be with the lord, it became clear that it became increasingly easier for him to lease land from the karsakas than to cultivate it under his own direct management.

By the time of Buddha, *Jatis* and tribes begin to loosely define themselves. Manu's systematization of professional jati into mixed castes seems to place a lower limit on the period in which the essential elements of the jati system were formed. The consequence of this collapse of the tribal system was not a single peasant class but a large number of peasant jatis. Some remain true to their old tribal names like the Gujjars. The formation of peasant

classes partly reflects another development, which is the continuous development of the social division of labour.

The Medieval Peasantry

For the extent of stagnate conditions of the peasantry; it shall not be assumed that life had changed for them just because of the improved records as we enter the era of the Delhi sultanate. The most essential question that needs to be answered is whether there happen to develop any internal factors for change in the tools of production. Some of the factors that need to be considered were agriculture technology and the spread of Islam. The provision of the Persian wheel for irrigation became widely popular in Punjab by the 16th century. It contributed greatly to the irrigation in the Indus Region. The art of Grafting too spread during the same time period which resulted in the improvement of fruit production.

Despite these changes, the basic social relationships in the villages remained unchanged. Islam also does not have any influence on the caste system. Thus, caste remained a positive factor in agrarian society. The social relations of the peasantry with the rest of the rural population remained intact. This is true in the case of the lower castes. The Muslim invasions of India endorsed the humiliating restrictions that had been imposed earlier. The class subordination of the peasantry thus continued in the medieval period. Therefore, it is right to argue that the village caste structure and its related elements formed in ancient India continued to function without any change till the end of the 18th century. Although there are examples of reforms by sultans such as the land tax i.e. Alauddin Khilji's *Kharaj*. Once it was established in the Delhi Sultanate; it carried on to the Mughal Empire with the same connotation. There was no difference between this tax and the tax levied on the peasants of ancient India. During the Mughal era, the introduction of a land tax also known as the Mal reshaped the relationship of farmers with their custodians. Taxes accounted for most of the surplus for the king and his *Mansabdar*. They had the power to force farmers to cultivate the land, to prevent them from leaving the land, and to bring them back if they did, which became a norm during the Mughal period. In the event of the peasants were unable to pay their taxes, they would face attacks and enslavement by the king's army. These measures became popular from the 13th century onwards until they became a common practice in the Mughal Empire.

Peasant Revolts in the Pre-Colonial Era

During the Mughal Raj, the state claimed a share of the land from the cultivators. The laws codified by Manu long ago had mentioned one-fifth of the total production as the divine share of the emperor. During war times, it was increased to one fourth. In the era of Akbar the Great, reforms were made that fixed the revenue for each type of land. A new system was introduced to calculate possible taxes on each piece of land. The land was scaled and divided into four classes, representing different grades of fertility. The new share for the government was kept at one-third of the total produce. So the Mughals never reformed the revenue system but put further burden on the poor peasantry. The later Mughal era is marked by the weakening of control over land revenue and reduced flow of income. In the times of Farukhsiyar (1713-19), the concept of revenue farming was introduced which asked the farmers to pay nine-tenths of the gross produce and keep the rest for themselves. However, the right to collect revenue started to sell off to the highest bidder. The peasants began to suffer which led to a revolt against the Ruling elites. By this time, the revenue farming system which extended to all parts of India paved the way for the *Jagirdari Nizam*. The Mughal sultanate suffered from various peasant revolts in the lands of Punjab, Sindh and the frontier.

Pashtun Peasants under Roshania Movement

Bayazid Ansari, born in 1525 in Jullundur, Punjab, to Pashtun parents, founded his Roshania movement against the Mughals. He began to oppose the Mughal rulers by following mysticism, but the most important aspect of the Roshania movement was his vision of collective agriculture. Bayazid Ansari advocated collective ownership of agriculture and resistance against the *Mansabdars* and *Jagirdars*. He was soon joined by various tribes in the fight against the unjust policies of the Mughals regarding land rights. His vision of collective farming was based on the belief that the land belonged to Allah and he gave it to his people. Since God made all people equal, the benefits of the land must also be fair. The battle against Emperor Shah Jahan resulted in the complete destruction of the villages and the death of Bayazid Ansari.

Punjabi Peasantry and Dulla Bhatti

Punjab's history places a great deal of importance on Dulla Bhatti's fight for the region's farmers. He and his allies began a guerilla campaign against the Mughals. Born to a warrior family, Dulla Bhatti is described by Fateh Muhammad as: "Walking in the

footsteps of his father Farid Bhatti and his grandfather Bijli Bhatti. Dulla Bhatti, a rebel against Emperor Akbar (1554-1605), waged guerilla warfare against the Mughal Empire. The imperial authorities put him to death, just like his father and grandfather before him. The spirit of opposition was so strong that Akbar was forced to relocate his imperial capital to Lahore for more than twenty years. The peasants refused to acknowledge Akbar as their King or even pay taxes. Landlords and *Mansabdars* used force to seize the land in reaction. The imperial court instructed the tax collectors to use harsh tactics including forcible evictions. This led to violent uprisings and fierce combat between the peasants and the local governors. Along with the regular plundering of caravans by the peasants, there were frequent clashes between the peasants and the Mughal army. For ten years, Dulla Bhatti persisted in his resistance in an effort to reform the socioeconomic system. Even though he lost, his heroic tales significantly aided the Punjabi peasantry in their fight.

Asiatic Mode of Production

Karl Marx believed that the peasants were disorganised and powerless to bring about change. He thought that this class will vanish, with the majority leaving the area. Social and economic dynamics are intimately interlinked. Karl Marx considered the peasantry to be disorganized and unable to bring about change. He believed that this class will disappear with most of the people displaced from the field. The productive force is the unity between means of production and labour power. He further argues that at a stage of development, the productive forces come into conflict with the existing relations of production and these relations become obstacles. Thus began an era of class consciousness. The development of exploitation, class division and private property cannot proceed gradually and continuously. A revolution is needed to take power out of the hands of one class and rests it in another in order to make it possible for the relations and forces of production to correspond once again.

In the Asiatic mode of production, the state has a historical presence of patriarchy, agriculture, and war. The peasantry had to pay tribute to their rulers in the form of taxes, unpaid labour, gifts etc. which the state owns as the largest landowner. This mode of production controls the production process politically rather than directly. This production method is poorly organized. For example; the Means of Production in China and Russia before the revolution had such characteristics. In societies where classes are divided, the forces of production

and relations of production are in sharp conflict. Output can be relatively remedied. As Marx rightly pointed out that if there are no classes; there will exist no class antagonisms and social evolution would cease to become political revolutions.

Punjab under British Rule

Punjab presented itself as an ideal location for a colonial market. With such a vision in mind, canal colonies were brought in; to turn millions of acres into blooming fields of wheat, cotton, and oilseeds. The British government introduced a parallel system with Western ideals. The traditional Panchayat system was replaced by a court system and new land colonies were created to determine land income in money and a land ownership system based on the concept of traditional British concept of private ownership of land. Thus began a new phase of colonial legacy that led to the indebtedness of the peasantry and their growing expropriation.

The British were quick to earn the loyalty of most of the ruling elites of Punjab. These local landlords were to serve as an intermediary between the colonial state and the people. This alliance was further strengthened during the mutiny of 1857. Punjab remained peaceful during the entire period. The Punjabi elite showed their loyalty to the Raj by providing soldiers to the Raj to ensure British control. Their support helped the British Raj to expand, consolidate and maintain its rule. As soon as stability returned to the Indian subcontinent; the British began to reform the system that they had inherited from the Mughals. The history of Agrarian reforms in Punjab by the British highlights their colonial vision. The land question is always central to any historical process. It is deeply connected to the socioeconomic and political life of a society. Land defines how social and economic life shall be organized. Similarly, it can also be a tool for change.

The First Settlement (1846-1865)

Land in Punjab was settled as a part and parcel of this agrarian extension. As the British began to assume formal powers of government and develop 'principles of state-craft' in the middle of the eighteenth century, they embarked on an ambitious program of revolutionizing the institutional structure of the agrarian economy of India. Relevant for our analysis is the Permanent Settlement of 1793 which clearly delineated private rights – especially property rights. The act guaranteed the legal subject a bundle of rights (use, alienation, transfer, etc.) for his/her possessions free from violations from other subjects. The British officials also prided themselves in their just governance on the basis that the British lifted a

heavy burden off the shoulders of the Indian peasantry by substantially cutting down on land revenue demands in order to make the settlement of land a reality.

Aristocratic Reaction and the Punjab Tenancy Act of 1868

However, the decision to maintaining the existing proprietorships was not as simple and straightforward. The Mutiny revealed a deep cleavage within the British government in India regarding land revenue administration. The British administration it seemed was divided into two camps: 'Punjab Tradition and 'Aristocratic Reaction'. The former supported the ideals of peasant proprietorship and the latter pushed for the retention and extension of powers of landlords. Aristocratic reaction emerged post-Mutiny as the government felt they needed sources of support from members of the local population. To turn to princes and landlords, who historically enjoyed power positions in Indian society, seemed like an obvious choice to this section of the British administration. Hence, they advocated for the extension of the power of landlords throughout India.

In February 1860, Lord Canning began his efforts of creating a class of 'independent gentlemen of property and influence'. To this end, he built up the landed gentry and appointed them powers of local administration. In Punjab he gave favours to the *Sardar* class: he gave them magisterial powers and united their lands. Through these measures, he hoped to transform a dangerous and unproductive aristocracy into a reliable and flourishing class. However, Lord Canning's efforts did not come without resistance. Radical reformers like John Lawrence who had fought for peasant proprietorship throughout his tenure in Punjab found Lord Canning's policy to be against the demands of social justice. The real threat to his policies came from the legacy of peasant settlement in Punjab.

Secondly, the majority of the claims of occupancy tenants were revoked. Revision of settlements began soon after the 'Mutiny'. Edward Prinsep, after his appointment as a settlement officer in 1863 was put in charge of revising settlements in Sialkot and supervising settlement officers in Lahore, Gujarat and Gujranwala. Prinsep, one of the most prominent figures of the post-Mutiny 'Aristocratic Reaction' criticized developments of the first settlement on the basis that the proprietary families had been dispossessed and the actual occupants of soil disproportionately favoured. As a result, he cancelled the claims of a large number of occupancy tenants and compensated them by

granting them long leases and relaxing their revenue burden.

Development of the Canal Colonies

It was amidst this conundrum that the idea of Canal colonies were born. Colonizers searched for open spaces that would allow for a model agrarian colony to exist. The planes between the Indus and Sutlej were identified. The vast stretches of scrubland populated only by semi-nomadic pastoralists where denser settlements were not possible due to the lack of monsoon rain seemed like an ideal place for setting up the model agrarian community that the British officers had envisioned. Nine major canals were constructed with a colony attached to each one of them, adding ten million acres of irrigated area in Punjab.

In the Punjab Gazetteer, the canal colonies are repeatedly praised as a success story by British officials for their profitability, increasing productivity, and providing employment. The British officials asserted that the canal colonies had proved to be "remunerative investments". For example, the Bari Doab in 1903-4 reaped a net profit of 12.68 per cent on its capital outlay. Furthermore, they argued that the area under cultivation in Punjab extended due to the construction of perennial and inundation canals. According to 'Report of the Indian Irrigation Commission, 1901-03' the average annual area irrigated through perennial canals increased "from around 943,000 acres in the five years ending 1985-86 to 4,123,500 acres by the end of the

century". Lastly, they were celebrated for providing employment in the form of owner-cultivation, tenancy, and wage labour. Colonists, as described in the Gazetteer, were mainly of three types: capitalists, peasants and yeomen. A major percentage of land (reaching up to three-quarters of total land) was given out as smallholdings. These holdings, officially known as "peasant grants" were assigned to the peasant population of the Punjab. Such a policy not only relieved some pressure off the overpopulated tracts in other regions of the province but also opened avenues for the Punjabi peasantry to produce for the market.

However, despite its achievements, canal colonies had an adverse impact on the social structure of Punjab. The nature of the distribution of canal colony land had the effect of deepening stratification in Punjab. Although as much as a third of the colony of land was granted to cultivators, this did not have a levelling effect on the agrarian structures of Punjab for the grants were mostly made to the existing agrarian classes of Punjab. In practice, this dynamic manifested through the official decree that gave the right of occupancy in the canal colonies only to the agricultural castes of Punjab. Those sections of the Punjabi rural community that did not enjoy access to land, such as the village poor, labourers, and those who belonged to the subordinate castes were de facto excluded from occupying colony land. The best that they could manage was horizontal mobility and never social mobility.

THE PUNJAB CANAL COLONIES

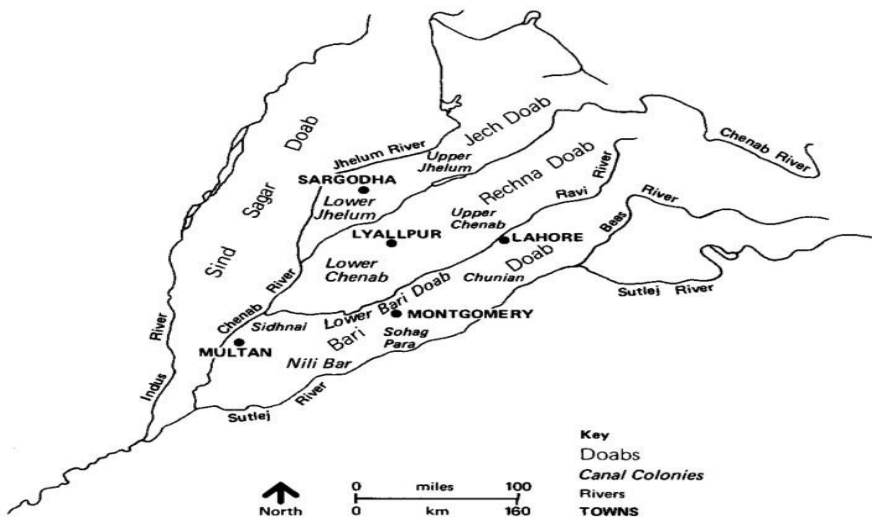


Figure 1. The Punjab Canal Colonies

Agitation against the Colonization Bill of 1906

Disruptions in the idyllic situation of the canal colonies appeared in 1902 onwards with the arrival of second-generation colonists. After three decades of unchecked prosperity, the Irrigation Department began to face problems as it had run out of prime land and had to distribute land that did not have access to canal branches. Secondly, opposition to the State's regulatory efforts had begun to take shape. The colonists agitated by the coercive nature of these demands and vexed by the inordinate fines imposed on defaulters, had begun to question the interventionist role of the state. The friction climaxed in 1906 when the Punjab Government prepared the Colonization Bill. The colonists perceived their problems to be rooted in their status as state tenants which legitimized the control of the state over their activities. From the beginning, the state enjoyed a strong hold over the canal colonies and the grantees. In order to materialize the Government's vision of modern, orderly agrarian spaces, everything, including rights and duties, had to be coded. The confusion regarding the nature of the tenancy rights of the colonists could not be tolerated. Hence, the Government Tenants (Punjab) Act III was passed in 1893 to specify lease agreements of government wastelands. With the act, a new class of tenants, known as the Crown tenants, was created. All the peasant grantees now became the tenants of the state who could never acquire proprietary rights. This made it easy for the state to control the activities of the grantees in relation to land.

Several rural collectives announced protests against the bill and organized mass demonstrations. The agitation quickly spread in the ranks of the Indian army, ex-government servants, and educated Punjabis living in the colonies. After five months of agitation, the Governor General eventually vetoed the bill on May 26th.

Soon after the abrogation, a commission was set up to inquire into the grievances of the colonists and to recommend a more acceptable form of legislation. The result was the adoption of the Colonization of Government Lands Act of 1912. The act largely favoured the colonists and indicated a retreat of the state from its interventionist role. The resistance eventually led to a victory for the colonists. The status of peasant grantees was changed from tenants (of the state) to that proprietors. The proprietary titles could be attained after the cultivators had served a period of time as occupancy tenants. Not only did this elevate their status but it also freed them from the various obligations that the state had previously imposed on them, especially

important was the state's retreat from matters pertaining to the inheritance of the lands and residence of the colonists.

Peasant Uprising in British India

The Agrarian struggle in British Punjab was aimed at reform, not revolution. Punjab's peasantry was then threatened by moneylenders, mainly Hindus. To this, the government responded by introducing the Punjab Land Transfer Act of 1900, which prevented the acquisition of agricultural land by people and groups whose livelihoods were not tied to the land. Various government measures such as the Land Colonization Act of 1900, the Land Transfer Act of 1901, the Property Transfer Act of 1904 and the Punjab Preference Act of 1905 caused a mixed reaction from political leaders. To some, this seemed like a heavy blow to national unity and to the effort to win favour with the Muslim *Zamindars* at the expense of the *Banias*.

The demand grew, and this protest turned into a violent struggle as the poor farmers developed an organized struggle against the *Zamindars*, the moneylenders, and the foreign government. The revolutionary group under the leadership of Ajit Singh, Sufi Amba Prasad and Agha Haider stood up against the oppressive government. The repressive policy of the Government that followed the agitation in the Punjab in 1907, gave rise to the revolutionary activities in the whole province.

Punjab Kissan Committees

The farmers of Punjab, after a long period of suffering and exploitation, decided to create a platform to speak out and work for the peasant agenda. In 1937, the Punjab Kissan Committee (PKC) was established. It was affiliated with the All India Kissan committee. Its first annual conference was organized by the Lyallpur peasant of the PKC in October 1937, chaired by Mr Sajjad Zaheer. It was decided at the meeting to increase advocacy for debt forgiveness, valuation of land revenues on an income tax basis, and tax exemptions for irrational and non-economic assets. They demanded that only the real cultivators of the land shall own the land. This conference was very meaningful and effective; Congress passed about 6 resolutions with the participation of farmers and workers from about 15 districts.

The role of the Punjab Committee of Kissan in the struggle for the cause of the peasantry is remarkable and profoundly impactful. Its rapid growth is also due to the political consciousness of different political factions, such as the 1915 Ghadar

uprising, the Sikh Gurdwara reform movement in the 1920s and the stimulation Kirti-Kisan party movement during the early years of India's economic recession, although the top leadership of the KPC in 1942 recognized the need to reduce dependence on Sikhs. British colonial rule relied on the support of landowners to protect their dominion, but at times, they had to deal with peasant movements exacerbated by disgruntled agricultural relations, Equality and market impact. Between 1860 and 1950 (with the exception of the half-decade from 1930 to 1935 when agricultural prices actually fell), prices generally rose. The most significant impact of this was the growing struggle between landowners and farmers to control the growing value of agricultural surplus. The landlord increases rent. The tenants protested. Punjab landlords assert their property rights by insisting on their right to evict tenants, while tenants claim (and sometimes and increasingly are granted) possession.

A Dream Deferred for Peasantry

There can be a number of arguments for and against the failure of the Punjab peasantry to wage a peasant revolution similar to the Chinese and Russian Models. Major factors that became a hindrance in the formation of an egalitarian society included the lack of class consciousness among the peasants of Punjab, a high degree of false consciousness such as Religio-nationalism, lack of peasant leadership and lack of ideological clarity.

The Punjab peasantry lacked class consciousness which greatly reduced the effectiveness of class struggle. The peasant mobilization never met its required level of passion required for mass movements. Unknowingly, the peasants and the tenants worked for their own exploitation by giving their surplus to the landlords and the British Raj. Similarly higher degree of nationalism and religious fervour among the peasant class, which Marx had termed as false consciousness had taken over the minds. It is evident by the fact that in the 1946 elections of united India and specifically the Punjab province; the Muslim league gained the majority. The manifesto that the Muslim league had presented to its voters advocated a populist opinion of Muslim separatism. Thus, it attracted the peasantry of western Punjab which was mostly Muslim. The exodus of Muslim and Hindu population to their respective states that took place

the next year highlights the severity of false consciousness. Another important factor that undermine the peasant movement in Punjab was the scarcity of leadership. The hardcore leaders were either executed or sent into exile. Thus the illiterate peasantry had no other option but to follow in the footsteps of Europeanized bourgeoisie crowns. The last crucial factor was the lack of ideological clarity. During the Second World War, both the Soviet Union and Britain became allies against the marching German and Japanese forces. At such point, the Indian peasantry who were already on the receiving end; started to figure out a new strategy. They had been guided by their Soviet comrades to help the British in the war effort. This pushed the Punjab peasantry into a state of dilemma. Though the Great War ended in the Allies' favour at the cost of sacrificing the peasant cause.

Conclusion

For centuries, the peasant of India has struggled under every regime. To begin with the Greek invasion of India; peasants faced exploitation by giving their surplus to their imperialist rulers. It remained the same during the Epoch of Arab imperialism. But alas the local rulers too shared the same qualities as those of the foreign invaders. The social structure appropriated the exploitation of the Peasant class. The entire Indian history has been summed up in Karl Marx's thesis of tools of oppression i.e. Religion and the Caste system are being exploited to safeguard the elite classes and prevent the poor from revolting against them. Till the time of British arrival, the Indian socio-economic system remains stagnant. The traditional Asiatic mode of Production remained functional for centuries which could only be exploited. This could be observed in reforms during Delhi Sultanate, Mughal Rule and the Sikh Empire. The British held this credit for breaking with the Old World and revolutionizing Indian Agriculture thus setting up the European ideals of historical progress of history. One of the greatest puzzles for historians studying Punjab has been the resilience of the peasant class of Punjab against all determinations of the ruling elites to displace, eliminate, and sometimes recreate this class. The answer, as this study indicates, is to be found not just in the policies of the state but also in how the peasantry have been able to organize themselves into a force that is either reckoned with or is seen as a body that is essential for the very existence of the state.

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