



Canalisation and colonization during colonial period: Adverse Impact on the rural Economy of Punjab

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Abstract

This paper focusses on the adverse impact of colonisation and colonization on the rural people and economy of the Punjab during colonial period. The economy of Punjab underwent tremendous change during the colonial period. Although the Colonisation brought prosperity as these projects were the chief factor for the growth of agriculture in Punjab. But this prosperity was brought at the expense of rural people of Punjab. The main aim of undertaking this research paper was to find out how much the rural people especially of canal colonies were affected by the irrigational works and what were the problems they had to face.

Keywords: colonisation, colonization, canal colonies, problems

Introduction

The canalization and colonization brought about a significant change in the rural economy of the Punjab during the colonial period. But these had been achieved largely at the expense of the indigenous inhabitants of the river valleys. Although they had settled to peaceful pursuits of agriculture, yet in the initial years of the colonization process, they faced numerous problems, they were treated harshly in their own lands, were not allowed to participate in the new agrarian enterprise. Their misery was further aggravated with the diversion of water from the Sutlej, Ravi and Chenab as it affected the agrarian operations along the downstream of these rivers^[1]. It also seriously affected the Sailab cultivation in the districts of Montgomery, Jhang and Gujranwala, Sailab was the most natural and least expensive from cultivation. The condition of even the most well to peasant and yeoman families was deteriorated to the extent that many of them migrated to canal colonies^[2].

Colonisation also caused the problem of Water-logging in the newly irrigated areas. Water logging was caused by the tendency of the cultivators to over irrigate their lands. Between 1920-21 and 1933-34 a total little over 10 million rupees was spent by the provincial government to tackle the problem of Water-logging but these measures proved inadequate. The problem became more acute- water logged area standing at about two million acres in 1946 in the thirteen districts of West Punjab. Water-logging and faulty alignment of canals led to the appearance of reh or W DX efflorescence in the canalized areas. It rendered the land unfit for cultivation. It was a common phenomenon along the course of the canals especially in the districts of Rohtak, Delhi and karnal and slowly spread to other regions and the districts of Lyallpur, Jhang and Montgomery. Water-logging also led to the spread of diseases like Malaria, Goitre, spleen diseases etc. Malaria was frequent phenomenon in certain parts of the south-eastern and sub-montane districts where water logging widely prevailed in the countryside. It not only added to the miseries of the rural folk but also led to the contraction of cultivation^[3].

An enquiry started by the govt. of India in 1875 noticed that the death rate in the districts irrigated by the Western Yamuna Canal was higher than that in the province as a whole. It was

seen that the artificial flooding produced by irrigation resulted in water logging and stagnation of water which resulted in the breeding of the mosquitoes. The malaria outbreak in the Karnal districts were traced to the irrigation of the rice fields by the Western Yamuna canal. The increased incidence of malaria and high mortality, in fact, coincided with the process of canalization from the areas irrigated by the Western Yamuna canal, Bari Doab and Chenab canal. Further, over irrigation and wrong alignment of canal problem of water logging was common which increased the incidence of malaria. The process of canalization and colonization also resulted in increasing the humidity level which in turn caused conducive conditions for the growth of rat flees and the consequent increase in the incidence of Plague in these areas. As a result of canalization and colonization and the increased humidity levels this epidemic erupted in the districts of Gujranwala, Jhang, Lahore respectively during 1812-1905, 1902-06 and 1904-06^[4]. The construction of railways resulted in the ecological disturbance. Railways were introduced by the Britishers for agricultural production and exports. The construction of several; bridges was accompanied by digging of the earth. This resulted in water-logging over large areas which helped in the breeding of mosquitoes. Moreover the construction of embankments for laying the railways tracks resulted in creating burrow pits over large areas. These got filled with water and vegetation during monsoons. Also, the natural drainage lines would get blocked by the embankments and created ponds and raised sub-soil and water levels^[5]. Colonisation in Punjab also speeded up the process of commercialisation of agriculture in Punjab. This process of commercialisation brought important changes in the rural economy. While it benefited the British economy as the Britishers were able to earn huge profits by getting commercialized agriculture products at whatever prices. These commercial crops were in high demand not only in other parts of India but in England and other European countries. But worse sufferers were Punjab Peasants as they were forced to sell his produce at whatever prices. It brought small landholders more tightly in the clutches of the money lenders from whom they had to borrow money to carry on their agricultural operations throughout the year. Moreover it

destroyed the self sufficiency of the rural economy.

Another side effects of the extensive canal irrigation system was an increase in the amount of rainfall and decrease in the depth of the water table, particularly in the bar lands. In the sandal bar of the Chenab colony, for instance, the average rainfall in the pre-colonies days was 9.97 inches per annum. It seldom exceeded 5 inches in the centre of the bar and in the bed days, there might be nothing also. The depth of the water table also decreased in the subsequent years ^[6].

The destructive action of chaos also increased especially during the end of the nineteenth century. Chaos were the local name of the hilly torrents that brought immense harm to the agriculture in the hilly areas in the form of sand drift or soil erosion. The chaos led to the decline of cultivation in the districts of Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Ambala. In 1889, it was estimated that in course of last ten or twelve years, on account of the action of the action of chaos in Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar, 16650 acres of land were covered into chaos totally lost their productive power while 23,260 acres in addition had also been damaged ^[7].

Canalization and colonization led to the unequal competition and unequal exchange between the canal colonies and the central Punjab. The expansion of means of communication in canalised areas increased the demand of agriculture production not only from other parts of India but also European countries. The peasant proprietors in these areas gave preference to vegetables and commercial crops which yielded higher profits. When the canal region replaced the central Punjab as the major exporter of Wheat early in the twentieth century, the central Punjab small holders began to suffer from unequal competition and taker on unequal exchange. Because of unequal competition, either in the canal cultivator simply did better than the central Punjab Petty commodity producer, either in the form of increased leisure or higher profits. Every harm of the agricultural labour in the central Punjab brought a smaller return than such labour did in the canal colonies. With unequal exchange, the canal cultivator reaped a profit directly from the labour of the toil and impoverishment of the central Punjab producers fed the wealth and leisure of the and cultivator ^[8].

Under the colonial rule, land revenue was an important source of revenue to the government. The imperialistic power used this system to secure it's basic colonial requirements. The land revenue assessment was nearly 40% in India as a whole but in the Punjab this was almost 50%.The land revenue was collected in a very strict manner. The peasantry had to pay land revenue in the appointed time in acute set of conditions and the nonpayment of the land revenue could led to loss of land ownership.

The Punjab was the most prosperous province in India under the colonial rule but it was also the most indebted state. More than 80%of the Punjab peasantry was in debt. The bulk of cultivators of Punjab were born in debt, lived in debt and died in debt. The rural indebtedness also got a momentum in the lost quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1865, only five or six percent of the peasant proprietors were seriously affected by in 1920s the indebtedness rose so high that only 17 percent of the percent of the Muslim majority district in 1901, out of 164 cultivators only one was free from debt Average debt per indebted proprietor rose from Rs.463 in 1919 to Rs.600 in 1930. The total mortgage debt also steadily increased. By 1874 over a million acres were mortgaged and by 1891 it rose it rose to 4 million By 1920 mortgage debts rose by Rs.25 crores ^[9]. There were many causes for the growth of

indebtedness. They were increase in the credit, rise in the price of land, small and scattered holding, litigations, heavy expenditure on social ceremonies, shift from cash to kind rents, narrow margin between profit and loss on a small holding, absence of thrift, insecurity of crops and cultivation on tradition lines. Frequent occurrence of droughts and droughts and families which brought about the failure of the crops also were the serious cause of indebtedness. Although Land alienation act was passed in 1900 but it failed to solve the problem of indebtedness. The number of land alienation also increased due to the continuous rise in its value. The total mortgaged area in the province rose from 20 lac acres in 1877-78 to 31 lac acres in 1929-30, in 1932-33, the total cultivated area under perfunctory mortgages was 11.6 percent of the total cultivated area in the province ^[10].

During the Colonization process, the colonial government made several terms and conditions for the allotments of Land in canal colonies. It was not easy for farmers to get ownership of land. The terms and conditions were extremely strict. They were supposed to pay land revenue, water rates & a yearly fee to the government. In 1906, Canal Colonization bill was passed which further worsened the conditions of the farmers.. The bill restricted the rights of the colonizers to make wills and denied them to cut trees on their land. The bill was introduced to enhance the rate of water supplied from the Bari Doab Canals. The civil courts were explicitly debarred from hearing the complaints of the colonists and the interpretation of the colonization officer only was to be accepted as true and valid. This placed the helpless colonists entirely at the mercy of the colonization officer regardless of their natural rights and interests. The colonists were also forbidden to transfer the property at will and strict primogeniture was to be adhered in the fuller ^[11].

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Canals also added to the miseries of the land owners who owned the land where construction work of canals was carried on. The Punjab government did not take any immediate step for the alleviation of their misery. However, some compensations were made to owners of land on the Ravi and Chenab for the injury done to them by the perennial canals ; many of them were given lands on the Chenab canal; these grants, however, could be made only to small percentage of the suffers and most of them practically remained uncompensated. For example, The Janglis were pushed off their pastoral grounds to make way for incoming colony grantees. The consequent dislocation and loss of livelihood led to resentment and protest, inducing the British to allow small grants to Janglis. But only those who were owners of cattle or camels were allocated land ^[13].

In conclusion, we can say that although Canalisation contributed maximum to make Punjab the most prosperous province of South Asia and was the chief factor for the prosperity and growth of agriculture in Punjab. But this prosperity was brought at the expense of rural people of Punjab. The construction of canals created some severe problems for the people of the province. Indigenous people were treated badly in their own lands and were not allowed

to participate in the new Agrarian enterprise. The condition of the Punjab peasant deteriorated as the rural indebtedness increased under the colonial rule due to the high rate of land revenue and water charges. Their condition further worsened with the Land colonization bill of 1906 which put many restrictions on the rural people. Commercialisation destroyed the self sufficient economy of the Punjab and brought Punjab peasant under the clutches of money lenders. The Colonisation also created the problem of unequal competition of Central Punjab with newly canalised Punjab. The rural people also faced the problem of water logging in the newly canalised areas which resulted in the breeding of mosquitoes that led to the outbreak of Malaria in the province frequently. Land Alienation bill of 1900 and the colonization bill of 1906 caused discontent among peasants of the province and these were one of the important causes for the agrarian unrest of 1907. Thus, we can say Colonisation and Colonization adversely affected the economy of the province.

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