



Short Review Paper

Transformations and Punjabization of the British Indian Army: A Study of Colonial Punjab, India

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Abstract

Punjab has undergone drastic changes and transformations during the British rule. With the closing of the second Anglo-Sikh War, Punjab had taken over by the British in 1849. With the becoming of British Province, it received special attention in the colonial policies. Moreover, Punjab had become crucial from its strategic and political implications. As it became a part of the British Empire, Punjab had experienced a lot of transformations in various fields like agriculture, irrigation, education, transport, and communication, etc. This paper is attempted to map the transformations in general and Punjabization of the British Indian Army in particular.

Keywords: Colonization, transformations, colonial Punjab, Punjabization of the British Indian Army.

Introduction

Before dealing with its transformations and Punjabization of the British Indian Army, it will be more interesting to visit its nomenclatures. It is well documented that Punjab had driven its name from 'panj – ab' a Persian word, which means the land of five rivers. Thus, Punjab had received its name "The Land of Five Waters", from the rivers Chenab, Ravi, Sutlej Jhelum, and Beas. Moreover, the geographical location of Punjab had made it the gateway of India since ancient times. Since ancient times, Punjab had remained the major ground of battles for numerous invaders and attackers. As a result, they had faced numerous invasions. Out of this, Punjabis people had become warrior, fighters, and survivors. It is upper stated that Punjab came under British rule in 1849 and it was the last province of India to annex by the British¹. As Punjab had become a part of British rule, a chain of changes and transformations got started. With a short period, the British had changed its face in various directions. Soon after annexation, they established a board of administration and kicked a new wave of development in colonial Punjab.

On the other hand, the British had explored the fine qualities of loyalty and bravery in the Punjabis. Consequently, the British had opened their defense forces to them for the recruitment in the British Indian army². Being a frontier province, Punjab acquired exceptional attention from the colonial administration. It is well pointed out that the geo-strategic and geo-political location of Punjab converted it into the major recruitment ground for the British Indian army.

On the other side, colonialism was expanding rapidly in the world. On the other hand, the expansionist policies of the British

and the Russian empires made the situation more badly. On the other side, British influence had extended upto Afghanistan. Thus, the Great Game had started between Russia and Britain so-called geopolitical contentions. At this point, they tried to establish their sway over Central Asia. Because it was acting as a buffer state between both empires³. Therefore, the present paper is attempted to visit various changes and transformations which occurred in colonial Punjab. The paper will emphasize on Punjabization of the British Indian army.

Broadly, the paper has been divided into three sections. The first section deals with crucial transformations of Punjab during the colonial rule. In this section, the study has broadly discussed various changes and transformations, especially focus on canal colonization, the introduction of technology in agriculture, etc. In such a case, Punjab had received the best construction of the canal system in Punjab during the British rule. Due to the construction of canals, Punjab had emerged as a major agricultural province of the Indian-subcontinent⁴. The canals also facilitated transportation and communication⁵. Further, these canals played a significant role to speed up British commerce and its manufactured goods from one place to another. By assisting the transport of British to reach as far as Kashmir, Central Asia, and Afghanistan and bring the products from these areas to the port cities.

A new wave of urbanization had been unleashed by these canal colonies in Punjab⁶. With the construction of these canals, the barren area of Punjab transformed into one of the best richest agricultural regions in the Indian subcontinent⁷. Thus, the construction of the canal was a great feat of British administration and engineering. Because the newly constructed irrigation system in Punjab had brought crucial transformations

in the social and economic lives of the people. The technological advancement in the field of agriculture during the colonial time is taken for discussion. After the annexation of Punjab, the British exchanged the sword of disbanded Sikh Soldiers with plough⁸.

With the coming of the British, various scientific and technological innovations had been introduced in Punjab. Out of this, the British had especially focused on the development and modernization of agriculture. Apart from the modern irrigation system, they introduced various techniques of cultivation. Moreover, a variety of new crops had been announced which were largely connected with the economic interests of the British Empire⁹. They gave more importance to those cash crops which were needed for the industries in England¹⁰. The second section of the paper has largely attempted for mapping the Punjabization of the British Indian army. In this, various compulsions and obligations had discussed which played an important role in making Punjab a main recruiting ground for the British Indian army. Because Punjabis soldiers could easily bear the harsh climatic conditions of Afghanistan and Central Asia¹¹. The empires were built on scare too in the third section, the study will study the impact of these transformations on the various aspects of Punjab.

Colonial Transformations in Punjab: A Fresh Perspective

It is well stated that geopolitical importance and the 1857 revolt had played a very significant role in positioning Punjab into British policies. From ancient times onwards, it remained the battlefield for foreign invaders. A long line of Invaders came and tried to enter central India. On the other hand, the British were scared of Russian expansion towards Central Asia. In this case point, the annexation of Punjab had become obligatory for the British Empire. Consequently, the British installed heavy military projects to curb the Russian expansion heading to the British Indian Empire. So, the British wanted to reduce the complex escalation of Russia. In this background, Punjab got a peculiar place. Soon after occupation, the British brought the best engineering here. However, its motive was colored with economic and political benefits. Keeping in view, the British launched a chain of changes and transformations in various fields like agriculture, irrigation, transport, education, and communication, and social institutions. Specifically, they brought drastic and wide-ranging reforms in the construction of canal systems, scientific techniques in agriculture and land revenue settlements, construction of Rail-Road links, navigation of rivers, promotion of trade, and modern education have to be understood in such a context. With the construction of a railway, Punjab had connected with the national and international economy. On the other hand, a waterfall of military cantonments also started along the railway lines. Further, it had imparted a way of new urbanization in Punjab¹².

We would focus on three important transformations in colonial Punjab in the coming pages.

Construction of Canal Colonies

After annexation in 1849, Punjab was pacified and integrate into the thread of the British Empire. Being a frontier state, Punjab had remained the battleground from ancient times. Consequently, its people engrained warlike qualities. So immediately after annexation, the British was desired to disarm Punjab. So they had tried to turn the warlike people into a peaceful business. In this connection, they had started to convert Punjab into the hub of agriculture¹³. So, the British had established a Board of Administration to strengthen their power and to govern the new British province. Hereafter, the board of administration had worked efficiently for the suppression of warlike people in Punjab. The board of administrations catered the anti-British elements from Punjab. All kinds of weapons were annexed from the people of Punjab. On the other hand, the Board of Administration started to work for the promotion of its agriculture. In the end, the British remained successful to disband the Sikh Soldier and handed them plough instead of a sword.

Finally, the stage had been set up to exploit Punjab's geography, the largest area of land, and extensive water resources of Punjab. For achieving the motives, the British had introduced the best level of engineering to build canals in the land of five rivers. For the construction of the canal system in Punjab, the British government had spent a significant amount to develop irrigation projects. As per some estimates, they had constructed the upper Jhelum, Upper Che-nab, and Loar Che-nab Bari do-ab canals by investing around Rs. 5,000,000¹⁴. With the opening of these irrigation links, Punjab had become a prosperous as well as a well-cultivated region. At this point, lower Che-nab canal was approximately 2700 miles long and has been considered one of the best irrigation systems in the world. The lower Che-nab canal irrigated a large area of land in the region. More fascinatingly, these canals had been flourished from both sides with roads and trees. Further, these roads as well as canals were utilized for transport and commerce. Ironically, the construction of canals opened the way for the exploitation of Punjab resources. With time, these canals had irrigated dry western Punjab and overcome the irrigation problems enormously. Further, it changed the face of Punjab geography and played a significant role in making the Punjab "Model Agricultural Province" of British India. Thus, canal colonies kicked a line of transformations in the socio-economic life of the region.

Before the colonial rule, the area of Punjab belonged to barren and arid with less availability of water resources for agriculture. Most people depended upon semi-nomadic lives. But with the introduction of canal colonies, six million acres of Punjab had been largely transformed into one of the most fertile region of South Asia. Thus, the British had paid special attention to rechange its agriculture and geographical aspects. Along with these, wide bazaars, streets, hospitals, schools had also opened and paved the way from nomadic to settled life during colonial Punjab. Thus, the canal system had kicked a new urbanization process as well as it remained profitable from a trade and

commerce point of view for the British¹⁵. Fundamentally, the British exploited the natural resources of Punjab with the expansion of canal colonies. On the other side, it had brought a revolutionary change in the working style of Punjab agriculture. Moreover, the Construction of the canal had also increased the total cultivated land of Punjab¹⁶.

Technological Advancement in Agriculture

For ending uncertainty to the British Empire, it had become significant to change the occupation of Punjabis people. In this point, the British had brought drastic changes in the pattern of Punjab agriculture. In this perspective, the construction of modern canal colonies was an important step for the British govt. Because it pushed its barren as well as arid agriculture in the most fertile area of South Asia. Additionally, the British had introduced scientific and technological innovations in Punjab's agriculture which supported the farmers for better production. They had introduced new varieties of crops, fertilizers, and techniques to improve agriculture as well as for surplus production. Consequently, new techniques and innovations enlarged the incomes of farmers and had given a way for upward mobility in the society to the millions of people. As earlier stated that the British had hurled new schemes to fulfill their personnel ambitions. More prominently, the British had broken down its traditional barter system of agriculture. With the short span of period, they had introduced new varieties of fruits and vegetables like tea, potatoes, sugarcane, indigo, tobacco, English fruits, and vegetables¹⁷. The new varieties of crops were appropriate to Punjab's climate and its soil. Moreover, cotton varieties of Egyptian and American had also started to produce during this time. Due to this, Punjab had produced 10 percent of the whole British India by the 1920s¹⁸. Consequently, the production of cotton had jumped quickly in Punjab b/w 1871 to 1936. For more clarity, the table has been added below:

Table-1: Total Area (Acres) Under Cotton and Sugarcane in Colonial Punjab.

Year	Cotton	Sugarcane
1871	6,95,108	3,33,657
1881	8,90,037	3,77,320
1891	5,00,299	3,63,976
1901	8,55,203	3,56,947
1911	14,62,500	2,98,296
1921	19,57,016	3,73,371
1931	21,59,722	4,74,655
1936	29,09,152	5,54,348

Despite upper given developments, the British govt had joined Punjab's agriculture with western mechanization. Further, they had brought new iron technologies and speeded up the working capacities of the Punjab farmers. During the colonial period, machines like sugarcane crushers, Persian wheels, and ploughs were most important. Further, a new style of cultivation techniques, sowing of crops, their rotation had been also changed with the coming of colonial masters. The advent of manure also played a very significant role in the surplus production of agriculture in colonial Punjab. The use of drills for sowing seeds greatly increased in Punjab during the time. Further, the introduction of manures had given a great rise in the production of agriculture. Fundamentally, the introduction of scientific and technological innovations is largely interconnected with transport and communications. Because the railway had integrated Punjab economy with the international economy. Consequently, it brought handsome profits to the people of Punjab exclusively for cultivators. Thus, British rule had kicked the process of the Commercialization of agriculture in Punjab. As it had shifted the local consumption towards the market by turning traditional crops with commercial crops. On another strand, Punjab had emerged as a major agricultural province of British India. It is also well stated that the British government had put up significant efforts for the development of agriculture. The introduction of western technology transformed substantially the medieval dialectic of agriculture and converted Punjab into a model province of agriculture. In practicality, the spring of new taste was coming from the economic interests of the British. Largely, they had promoted those crops which were needed for the British industries¹⁹.

British Indian Army and 1857 Revolt: Pivotal Role of Punjab

British Indian Army played a very significant role in upholding and expanding the British Empire at the various distances of the world. Thus, it had given a strong hold to fulfill the British imperialistic motives. Primarily, the British Indian army had organized to banish the internal disturbance. It is well documented that before the 1857 revolt, the British Indian army was largely recruited from Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. As the revolt of 1857 took place, the British govt had brought drastic changes in the building of its defense forces. In this case of point, Punjab had played a momentous role to suppress the revolt of 1857. Being loyal in the 1857 revolt, Punjab had strengthened their importance in the British eyes. Because Punjab specifically Sikhs and Muslim forces played a significant role in maintaining British Empire. Due to strategic location on the NW Frontier, Punjab had become the major recruitment ground for its army. Besides, Punjabi people had the best capabilities to bear the harsh climatic conditions. They were suited for the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Central Asia. After the end of the second Afghan war, the British were expected the third war as well. Moreover, it was predicted that Russia will also involve in the upcoming war. Consequently, the British manipulated fear from Russian

expansion towards the British Indian Empire²⁰. As a result, the involvement of Punjabis in the British Indian Army had increased rapidly. More notably, the local troops had to pay less as compared to the soldiers of other provinces of British India. However, Punjab had become an agricultural province during the colonial period. Even then, its people had joined the armed forces to enhance their agricultural income. Despite the upper, the theory of martial class had also considered one of the important components. As upper stated that Punjabi's remained natural warriors from ancient times onwards. In 1879, the Eden commission had also reported that Punjab was a green pasture as well as the major recruitment ground for the recruitment. Due to this, Punjab started to call the sword arm and shield of India by the British²¹. As per the British govt, some categories were classified as a martial race of Indianlike Jatts, Rajputs, Sikhs, Gujjars, Balochs, Gurkhas, Pathans. Therefore, the British Indian army had recruited extensively from such races. In this case of point, Punjab got an extremely pivotal place. Particularly post-1857, Punjab had lagged behind other provinces of British India in the recruitment clock. Punjab had supplied 44 percent of soldiers in the formation of the Bengal Army²². After 1870, it had become the cannon fodder for the British Indian army. It had gained considerable growth during the period 1885 to 1893. Punjab not only played a key role to suppress internal disturbances. Moreover, it had contributed massively during the World Wars. It had observed that Punjab had supplied 54 percent of the British Indian Army during World War I. In this, approximately 64,000 Indian soldiers had lost their lives. Not only in World War I, India had also involved thickly during World War II and supplied 1.8 million soldiers. These soldiers had fought and shed their blood to maintain the British Empire at the various distances of the world²³.

Conclusion

From the upper portrayal, it had well explored that Punjab had remained very close military relationship with the British Empire. Supplementary, geo-strategic, as well as geopolitical position, had unfolded its importance in the British policies. After the 1857 revolt, the British brought structural changes in the recruitment policies and some local areas/regions got a peculiar place. At this point, Punjab had received the utmost attention from the British. Soon after its annexation, Punjab received drastic transformations. A new wave of development kicked into every aspect of colonial Punjab. Specifically, the British had transformed its face with the construction of the modern canal system and the development of agriculture. Because it had transformed the barren area of Punjab and laid the foundation of agriculture development. Consequently, Punjab had become the 'Model Agricultural Province' of British India. Despite these, Punjab emerged as an important recruitment center for the British Indian army. Further, these transformations fetched a chain of changes and transformations in the various aspects of Punjab. It changed significantly the various aspects of the Punjabis people. However, British rule

restructured Punjab but their destructive policies cannot be ignored.

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