

URBANIZATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE COLONIAL PUNJAB (1931-1947)

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ABSTRACT

The Punjab incorporation with the British Empire brought in new men and new ideas which affected social life and social structure. The colonial rule speeded up the process of urbanization which led to transformation in behavioural pattern and living standards. In the Punjab, urban growth was directly linked with the colonial policies and agricultural and commercial developments. Most of the developments in the canal colonies. The process of urbanization, though limited in scale, was qualitative change bringing in new products and demographic shift.

Colonialism in India was actualised in a number of urban situations where Britons, civilians, and military supervised the operation of government. The rate of change and specific manifestations of the process of change, however, varied from one area to another. The greatest transformation took place in those urban places where the substance of colonial power and the activity of the Western presence was the largest. Urbanization as a process of has multiple aspects as it reflects, demographic shift in the population leading to changes in the social structure, it also cultivates culture, a way of life. In the changing behavioural pattern, urbanization leads to heterogeneity and segregation of population; superficial, anonymous and transitory social relations and reliance on formal control mechanism. Industrialization is considered as a crucial variable in the process of urbanization. Urbanization leads to transformation of the basic pattern of life as changes take place in the pattern of consumption. To agricultural produce are added manufactured goods and services. In fact, urbanization is a multi-faceted process that 'reveals itself through temporal, spatial and sectoral changes in demographic, social, economic, technological, and environmental aspects of life.'

Historical growth of a settlement into a town and their city evolves around multiple factors. It connotes 'urbanity', civilization in contradistinction to rural as traditional and folk. In earlier phases, a city exhibited higher culture, an administrative centre and with commercial linkages it acquired economic context. With commercial and industrial revolutions, city as a phenomenon became bigger, diverse and dynamic. It grew out of rural surplus due to agricultural growth. Other factors which facilitated its rise were relative peace, trade and commerce, industrialization, transportation, technology and social-cultural changes. The process of urbanization speeded up with economic policies of the rulers and the means of communication and transformation. Fernand Braudel remarked that 'there is no town, no town let without the villages'. This rural urban interaction was dynamic. It led to simultaneous rise of towns and villages in the canal colonies. Linkages remain life line of towns and cities. Fernand Braudel acknowledged: "without markets and roads, there would be no towns." Moreover, towns remain interdependent as 'a town never exists unaccompanied by other towns; some dominant, others subordinate.... all are tied to each other.' The colonial state provided infrastructure, and social and economic milieu for the development of towns in the Punjab. In fact, the cities and large towns became the spearhead of the new political, military, economic and cultural penetration, with significant implications for urban centres. The traditional pattern of urban functions and interaction with the countryside were re-oriented.

In the Punjab, urban growth was directly linked with the colonial policies and agricultural and commercial developments. Both canalization and colonization with huge capital investments transformed the commercial and economic profile of the Punjab. Canal irrigation had brought 14 million acres under cultivation in 1931. The British put emphasis on export of raw materials and import of finished goods. Consequently, the manufacturing in towns and cities lagged behind commerce. Meanwhile, nine colonies had been establishing

in the canal irrigated areas. New villages came into existence which needed the services of urban centres. Between 1881 and 1941, a number of towns increased from 240 in 1881 to 292 in 1941. In the 1880s, there was one town for every 1540 sq.km whereas in 1941 this average was one for every 518 sq.km. There were new urban centres in the canal irrigated areas of the Lower Bari Doab, Rachna and Chaj Doabs. These included Sargodha, Lyallpur, Montgomery, Toba Tek Singh, Gojra, Kara and Chichawatni. Between 1881-1941, the population of the Punjab' increased by 52 per cent. The rate of increase was over 100 per cent in such colonies as Jhang, Shahpur, Multan and Sheikupura; and over 200 per cent in Montgomery and over 2200 per cent in Lyallpur district. New towns developed along railway lines and *mandi* towns such as Farukhnagar, Hodal, Abohar, Mansa, Jaito, Gidderbala, and Bathinda. In 1931, about 29 new urban centres were added and this number increased up to 49, the largest number added in 1941. In all, 131 new towns were added to the list of urban centres between the years 1881-1941. Migration towards towns and cities had social background. The improvement in the means of communications and transportation opened up for career advancement. The victim of village community could now defy its undue harassment and shift to the town. The socio-economic equilibrium was seriously disturbed.

Table: I: Decadal Growth Rate of Punjab (1901-1941)

Decade	Total	Rural	Urban
1901-11	-10.78	-10.46	-13.60
1911-21	+6.26	+6.17	+6.92
1921-31	+12.02	+8.92	+34.37
1931-41	+19.82	+16.06	+41.84

Source: J.K. Gupta, "Urbanization in Punjab: Problems and Prospectus", *Five Thousands years of Urbanization: The Punjab Region* (Ed. Reta Grewal), Table 16:1, p.241.

With the British, a new pattern of development began with administration and military requirements. In the earlier phase, traditional cities followed rigid class and caste distinctions in the residential areas. The Colonial Punjab had four distinct urban forms: (i) indigenous towns; (ii) Western extension known as the Civil Lines; (iii) the colony town in the canal irrigated areas; and (iv) the hill station. The indigenous cities acquired new fixtures and architectural forms such as clock towers, statues, town halls, and circular roads. The developed residential suburbs called Model Town at Lahore and Amritsar and the Indian stations as Montgomery came up for the well-off and professionals. The British established separate colonies outside the towns and cities to serve as district headquarters. They considered the indigenous centre 'unhealthy, noisy and distasteful.' The European businessmen, Anglo-Indians and sometimes the military officers also lived in the civil stations which were called the Civil Lines. With the passage of time, the sites for building houses in the civil stations began to be sold by the government to prominent persons, including the well-to-do Indians. The 'anglicised' or Western town was not super imposed on the existing one but sprang up initially as a suburb and extended in various directions to encircle the old city or town. The area between the old town and new settlement was divided by maintaining a green belt of gardens between the two.

In the 1860s, the British established military cantonments in North Western India. Generally, a cantonment housed around 5000 people. These places followed the principle of social segregation with parade grounds, exercise grounds, canteens, hospitals, churches, cemeteries and shopping areas for the Europeans and natives. The cantonments had effective means of communication in metalled roads, rail links, post offices, telegraph and telephone connections. The colony town was a planned model settlement built at the specifically chosen market (*mandi*). The famous colony towns were Lyallpur, Montgomery, Okara, Chichawatni, Sargodha, Gojra, Toka Tek Singh, Sangla and Arifwala. The British also

established hill stations famous of which were Mussoorie, Dalhousie, Kasauli. In 1856, the Cart Road between Kalka and Shimla was completed. In 1903, Kalka and Shimla railway link was opened for passenger traffic.

The colonial period saw emergence of towns and cities in a big way. During 1881-1941, the population in the cities increased by over 600 per cent; in the middling centres by over 1400 per cent. Urban population increased from 9.8 per cent in 1881 to 13.9 per cent in 1941 in the Punjab. The city of Lahore saw change in the occupational structure. By 1921, persons employed in traditional textiles had decreased from over 6 per cent in 1840s to mere 1 per cent. In 1931, 'industrial workers had increased to about 23 per cent and traders to 15 per cent. The government servants increased from 10 per cent to 18 per cent. In Amritsar, about 31 per cent of urban population was employed in industry in 1931; the traders increased to had 26 per cent of the population. The cities of the Punjab grew at the expense of the small towns, the growth in urban population was less due to natural increase and more due to migration. The large urban centres had a lower death rate. In response to new economic opportunities and technological advancement, people tended to move from petty trading and traditional crafts to factory industry as well as to external trade and transportation. There was diversification and reorientations in urban functions. However, the indigenous town underwent few changes and remained the traditional Indian city with a small suburb of colonial necessity.

The early British administration and missionaries concentrated mostly in the towns and cities, they established schools, hospitals and printing presses and made mark of presence. The cities and large towns had higher educational institutions such as Panjab University, Lahore, established in 1882. The new education aided by the growing use of the printing press, contributed towards the emergence of a sizeable professional middle class both within and without the government service concentrated in the urban centres. The urban

centres provided employment opportunities with increasing pressure on land, unremunerative traditional occupations, economic inequalities, poverty and aspirations for better life people began moving to cities and towns bringing about a substantial changes in the demographic and economic profile of these urban centres. They included artisans, menials educated professionals, merchants, and businessmen. The shortage of female in the general population in the towns accentuated by the migratory character of the labour class. The census of 1931 noticed that the bigger the town, the smaller number of females in it. In the 1930s, professionals people began moving outside the walled area to other colonies. They took to new sports like hockey, football, tennis, cricket, and even volleyball. The traditional sports like wrestling, kite flying and flying pigeons continued to be enjoyed in the old cities. The British established outdoor sports. There were parks, clubs, gymkahnas in the cities like Lahore, Multan, and Ambala. European enjoyed badminton , polo, and races. On the whole, the city remained a net beneficiary in terms of inflow of commodities, capital and manpower. It functioned as a conduit between the villages and the metropolitan economy. However, the quality of life offered by the city to the incoming villagers remained far short of the civic amenities. with the growth of trade and industry, people began to feel free to abandon their traditional occupations and take up new professions. Members of the higher castes under the stress of economic circumstances were choosing new careers. Many Brahmins and Khattris were seting up as cart drivers, tailors, traders, shopkeepers, commission agents, vegetable sellers, and even cooks and dish washers. Vocation was no longer and distinguishing feature of a high or low caste. Moreover, new working places such as offices, trading centres, markets, factories further weakened the impact of caste restrictions. The cinema houses, tea shops, wayside *dhabas*, public transport catered to all those who had money to spend irrespective of caste. The people began to realise that a good house means a longer life. In the

construction of houses, care was taken of sanitation and ventilation. In the canal colonies, brick houses and luxuries came up fast.

The manufacturing activity of the artisans was important for the sustenance of the urban economy. In the early decades of the 20th century, the hand weaver was threatened with extinction and the brass maker could no longer ply his craft. Unemployed artisans from the rural districts flocked to the towns and readily absorbed. During the World War II, the artisans were in great demand. Many were enlisted in the army. Moreover, the city of Lahore saw spurt in construction and furnishing which raised the demand of *Lohars*, *tarkhans* and masons. The wages were relatively higher earning upto Rs. 4 a day. Lahore Improvement trust gave fillip to building. The manufacturing activity in the upper Bari Doab region was substantially reduced or reoriented. The inflow of factory made goods, whether from Great Britain or the other parts of India, significantly curtailed the market for local goods. In due course, the traditional manufactures were crippled. Under the British rule, artisanal skill were harnessed in new areas such as making high quality furniture and producing metal ware for the British. The British officials held 'the native artisans in the Punjab' in high esteem. One pattern of the migration to the canal colonies was that the dominant cultivating group took along its artisans and menial castes. The enterprising menials and artisans began to purchase land or take it on mortgage. Undoubtedly, the change was on a small scale, yet significant. Land became chief means of raising their status in the village as well as of investing their savings.

The impact of British rule and their new policies had deep influence on the resulting process of urbanization. New urban forms-cantonment, hill station, civil lines, colony towns emerged; new town plans of western design and needs; and new urban services-municipal, water, electricity; emerged in this processes and patterns to understand social change.

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